THEY STOOD IN THE DOOR

DON MacNAUGHTON

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This book is dedicated to:
all past members of the now disbanded
16th Independent Parachute Brigade
A formation that has proven
to be sorely missed

And in memory of

Ian McKellar
Steve Harrison
Terry Brown
Tom Mechan
Steve Prior
and
Gordon 'Doc' Findlay

Just some of those who have died while on
operational service

FOREWORD

Although this book is of the Army, describing vicious fighting against Arabian hill tribesmen, Aden terrorists and Indonesian troops in the jungles of Borneo, it is not a war book. The purpose of this story is to introduce its reader to the men who have and are so professionally serving them and their country. But above all it wishes to unveil the barrack-room humour that is so distinctively unique to the British Army and which at times can only be described as totally unbelievable.

'An army is a crowd which obeys.'

Napoleon Bonaparte

CHAPTER 1

> But a man in khaki kit who could handle men a bit,
>
> With his bedding labelled Sergeant Whatsisname.
>
> *Rudyard Kipling*

Dressed in casual civilian clothes, Warrant Officer second class, David Urwin had just completed the last military deed of his Army career. The four blankets he had folded, which now lay on the mattress of his recent bed were regimentally stacked one on top of the other, plumb-line straight and squared to the fraction of an inch. This act was generated neither by necessity nor rigidly ingrained Army bull. He did it because he had a few minutes to spare and nothing to do. With one last check through the dresser drawers, he picked up his grip, locked the door to the bunk, then taking the key with him walked down the stairs of the Mess living accommodation.

Outside he crossed the short distance under the overhead awning, to pull open the door to the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess of the Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Depot. In the entrance hall he paused, placing his grip against the wall, while glancing through the door of the bar to find it still in a messy state from the night before. Moving on to the dining room, he found just one other person there before him, this — a Sergeant dressed in No 2 dress uniform — reading the back page of a Sunday newspaper.

"Morning Tom, has Spurs sold that wank striker of theirs yet?" He asked in a mocking tone, knowing the Sergeant to be a keen Tottenham Hotspurs' supporter. Tom Phillips looked up with a grin.

"Thank God you're going Sir, I've had ten years of you taking the mick out of me and Spurs."

"Any problems last night?" Grinned back the Warrant Officer changing the subject.

"I've got two recruits in the cooler, MPs brought them in drunk. Then here, after you went to bed, Nobby Sharp and Stan Waiter had a set-to," replied the Sergeant, reaching for a metal teapot.

"What was the outcome of that?" Asked Urwin, sitting down to accept the drink being poured for him.

"Two torn Mess Dress jackets and no doubt a basket of extra duties

from the RSM," smiled Phillips, standing up to push open a swing-door beside the table, then pause before disappearing through it.

"I'll tell the cook to bring another breakfast in."

This conversation resulted from the fact the Sergeant had been on duty as the BOS (Battalion Orderly Sergeant) for the last 24 hours, and as such had to keep himself informed of all incidents that happened within the barracks.

"What time do you get off-duty?" Asked Urwin, as he returned to his seat.

"Nine, I hand over to Pete Swain." Urwin sipped his tea, shifting the name through his mind.

"He's not 5 Para is he?"

"No Sir, 3, but a good lad, knows his stuff and keeps his platoon on the ball," replied the Sergeant.

Urwin acknowledged by pushing his lower lip out in quiet agreement.

A cook, clad in white jacket and trousers, appeared through the swing-door to lay a full breakfast plate before the two Mess members, receiving a thank you from each in return.

"You kept your speech short last night Sir," commented Tom.

"I thought you would have rabbited on a bit, seeing it was your last chance."

"There wasn't much I could have said that hasn't already been said before," replied Urwin, looking up from his plate with a shrug.

The question was in reference to his Dining Out of the Regiment by the members of the Sergeant Mess. This should have happened within his own battalion, but unfortunately time couldn't be found as they had suddenly been rushed away to fulfill a role in the recent Falkland Islands' crisis and were at present aboard a requisitioned Cunard liner on their way to the South Atlantic. The Battalion Regimental Sergeant Major, who was responsible for these Mess matters, did, however, make arrangements for this to be done here in the depot, while he was living in, completing a demob course at the local resettlement centre.

Tom was right, he *had* kept his goodbye speech short. For over the years he had seen people on these occasions commit every sin from slagging the regiment and the people in it for destroying their careers, to breaking down and crying. He didn't give himself the time to fall into either of these traps. Besides, for Urwin this was an anti-climax,

there were only a few friends serving in the depot at present. Most of the others being the usual base wallahs who never leave it, or those from other battalions, with recruit platoons to nurse through their basic training.

Last night had been a silent easing out the back door. At the end of the meal, when everyone had moved from the dining table to the bar, he made a point of finding those he wished to say goodbye to, said it, shook some hands more firmly than others, said goodnight to the Regimental Sergeant Major, then went to bed. It wasn't sour grapes that prompted his behaviour — far from it — Urwin had enjoyed his career in the regiment and would have spent the last 22 years no other way. It was just that this phase of his life was now over.

"What are your plans now?" Asked Phillips, pushing his empty breakfast plate away.

"I'll be living up in East Anglia; I've a house just outside Norwich. Mary and the kids have been living there for the last two years," was Urwin's reply, also finishing his meal.

"Bit rough that, you must have spent enough time apart over the years without adding the last two to it as well."

"Oh aye, at one stage I spent more time away than home, but that's finished now. I've a jammy number working for the father-in-law," winked Urwin, raising his teacup to his lips.

Phillips smiled, but asked no more of the Warrant Officer's plans for Civvy Street. Dave accepted this, not wishing to elaborate on the event too much, for this could sound as if he was sheltering under the wife's father during his exit from the Army.

This was hardly the case, the firm — a small fleet of lorries which Urwin had worked with on and off during periods of leave — he would now be expected to manage. His father-in-law, who was retiring so Dave could take over, had on several occasions warned him that at times the administration could become extremely hectic, but he could not see too much aggro from that department. Hell! He had been Company Sergeant Major of 5 Para's Headquarters' Company for two years — if he could hack that drama, nothing could prove too difficult for him.

Tom drained his cup and stood up.

"Duty calls Sir, I promised Pete I would mount the guard for him this morning so he could have a few extra minutes in bed." Urwin also stood.

"Here, I'm off as well. I want to catch the nine-forty train. I'll walk

with you down to the guardroom."

Outside the late spring sun shone, only hindered slightly by light cloud. The leaves on the cultivated trees planted within the depot were no longer limp, but beginning to expand and stiffen. At the rear of the guardroom Tom stopped, putting out his hand to say farewell.

"I thought I said goodbye to you last night," said Urwin with a half-smile.

"Aye you did, but I think I owe you an extra one. You probably don't remember, but if it hadn't been for you I wouldn't be here now, more likely half-way through a life sentence for murder. It was during the '73 tour in Belfast. I was in your patrol one night and some bastard gobbed in my face. If you hadn't been there I would have killed him and that would have been me for the high jump."

Urwin rocked backwards with a grin, releasing the other's hand.

"I can't remember that, all I recall is, we did a pretty good job of looking after each other."

"Aye, guess we did. Anyway Dave, get stuck into Civvy Street," replied the Sergeant, using Urwin's christian name for the first time. Then raising his arm in a goodbye gesture he turned, striding off towards the back entrance to the guard room. Urwin, half turning, stopped to watch the Sergeant pass the ammunition store-room.

Sergeant Urwin guided his six man patrol down the street, three men either side, with ten or fifteen metre gaps between each. Urwin led the right hand file, his second-in-command, a Lance Corporal, was rear man of the left hand group. The first soldier of the opposite file was a Private, but a good man, twenty years old with promise for promotion. This was his second tour in Ulster and he showed a confidence that impressed him.

The patrol moved at a slow pace with every man's head up, constantly-rotating eyes taking in all objects and movement. The evening, just turning dark, was still warm, causing Urwin to taste camouflage cream as it entered the edges of his mouth, delivered there by light perspiration seeping down his cheeks. The area was a council housing estate, all brick with small front gardens. On the doors of most houses was pinned a printed notice 'Rent Strike', which told the security forces this house was backing the present Republican line; or perhaps they found it safer to put the notice on the door than run the risk of having the head of the house knee-capped.

Urwin stopped to move into a gateway. He had seen the leader of

his left hand group stop a man. The Sergeant crouched, looking to see that the rest of the patrol had stopped and were taking cover as well. It was normal to halt people and question them, being legal under the Security Act; it allowed troops to put names to faces in order to identify who lived where in their area. Urwin suddenly tensed, gripping his rifle, he had looked towards his left hand man again, and sensed that the local was not being co-operative. Standing up, he stepped off the sidewalk into the street, making for the two men across the road. Suddenly the soldier started back. “You bastard!” he heard him curse.

Urwin saw him bring his rifle up, heard the weapon being cocked, then the low click of the safety-catch being moved to the firing position. His last two steps were at the run, pushing between the soldier and the man. Looking straight at his patrol member he said in a low-key voice, but hissing his words between clenched teeth, “Phillips, get across that street and take over my position in the right hand file.”

With spittle and phlegm clinging to his face, Phillips’ eyes glared over his shoulder, showing a burning rage. “I want this bastard first Sarge, he just hawked a mouthful in my face.”

As he talked, Phillips was unconsciously trying to edge around his Sergeant. Urwin grabbing the front of his smock just below the throat to again hiss between his teeth, “I’m handling this now, do as I say. If you can’t take this kind of shit, then put in a transfer to the REME.”

Phillips, shocked into regaining his composure, shifted his gaze to Urwin, the fire that had lit his eyes beginning to cool. Loosening his grip on Phillips’ smock, Urwin transferred his hand to a shoulder, turning him into the street to point the soldier in the direction of the gate. With a gentle push Phillips trotted away looking to left then right, holding his rifle at the low, ready position.

“And get that round out of your chamber,” commanded Urwin, with a loud rasping whisper.

Then he turned on the face-spitter to give a wide smile and a well practised, “Good evening Sir, now what seems to be the trouble?”

The Sergeant pegged him straight away — professional troop-baiter — but he went too far with Phillips, almost coming unstuck, having only just recovered.

A few inches shorter than Urwin, thirty-fivish, dark, thin, with a full round well-worn face. His coat, a dark donkey jacket, he wore hanging open. After his separation from Phillips, he had cringed back into a hedge, growing out of the garden just off the sidewalk.

Deceived by Urwin's cheerful greeting he now thought he had a soft one to spew his mouth on.

"It's youse bastard English," he started, taking a step forward.

Urwin also took a step forward, driving the muzzle of his rifle into the spitter's stomach, doubling him over with a loud gasp of air rushing from lungs to lips. Urwin pulled him out of the hedge he fell back into, by his hair, to put his mouth close to the spitter's face, giving him the first commandment of the Ulster streets.

"Look you, we're going to be here for a few months yet, so from now on you will only speak to us in a civil manner, do you understand?"

No answer. "Do you understand?" Repeated Urwin, driving his rifle barrel in again, this time above where the man was holding his stomach.

Feeling the muzzle scrape across the lower ribs, pain opened the mouth, "Yes, yes," it came, shouted. Spitter had now lost all confidence, his face only reading shock and pain.

"For the rest of the time that we are here, I don't want you giving me or my men any more trouble, OK?"

A reply came but Urwin wasn't interested. Again he pushed his rifle barrel into the man's stomach.

"I says OK?" This time the reply came louder, but again Urwin didn't acknowledge, continuing to throw his rifle forward. The man trapped by the hedge only able to turn away or double his body, caught every jab as the Sergeant rammed the muzzle of his rifle in. This caused no broken skin, just slight bruising. However, the pain would remain for days. Spitter was begging now, his voice getting loud and hysterical.

"Car coming Sarge."

Urwin turned to see his second-in-command standing a few feet away, facing into the street. His words were matter-of-fact, for he hadn't approached Urwin to warn him of the impending arrival of a bright light — he was there to cover the back of his Sergeant while he was occupied in conversation. Urwin turned to assess the spitter, now bent over, breathing quick and raspy, with the odd whimpers thrown in. Satisfied his point was made, the Sergeant replied to his second-in-command. "Right we'll move on," he said, facing the street.

The Lance Corporal snapped his fingers twice, then as a signal to the whole patrol, held his arm out, raising it with the palm upwards.

The patrol as one, stood up and resumed its slow but alert progress.

Urwin watched as the Depot BOS turned the corner of the ammunition store on his way to the guard room. His head erect, the arms swinging naturally in rhythm with his legs, which paced forward with the energy and strength of someone not unaccustomed to vigorous movement. ‘Yes,’ thought Urwin, ‘all the best to you too, Tom.’

On his way past the sentry box at the entrance to the depot, Urwin winked towards the sentry.

“Alright son?” He queried with a smile.

“Yeh, fine,” replied the sentry, returning his smile. There was no accompanying, respectful ‘Sir’, but Urwin hadn’t expected it. The recruit didn’t know who he was without a uniform, he could have been Little Jack Homer. Still, times have changed; when he was a recruit you would have called a broom handle ‘Sir’ if it spoke to you.

Passing the showpiece Dakota airplane, coloured in Second World War brown paint and white markings, parked outside the Regimental Museum, he crossed the dual-carriageway to turn up the hill on Queen’s Avenue, towards Aldershot town. To his right was the relatively new prefab, concrete and glass barracks that replaced the older red-bricked Victorian billets, which had been demolished during the re-building in the early sixties.

On the brow of the hill, Urwin swung off the avenue to cut across a space of rough landscaping. This was history to him, for it had once been Maida Barracks, the old Parachute Regiment Depot. The only building still standing was its adjoining gymnasium, a large brick structure that held no pleasant memories. Further on he passed over an area of ground which also affected him in the same way — this used to be the depot guard room, now only grass turf.

A few minutes later as he started down Gun Hill, passing one of Aldershot’s older landmarks, the Cambridge Hospital, he glanced towards a monument on the right hand side. This was built in tribute to those of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who had fallen while serving in the Boer War, but Urwin remembered it as the spot behind which Fred Cousins and a WRAC from Mandora Barracks had had it off one night while returning from the NAAFI club, then finding herself without an excuse for being late in — poor Fred ended up lumbered with a rape charge.

As he began the steep drop downhill, Army married quarters could be seen through the bordering trees. These to his right were also mainly cheap prefabs, having also been constructed in the sixties to

fill a large void in the Army's quartering accommodation at that time. Those to the left, Waterloo Park (built of brick and not as new), however, considered to be the more aristocratic quarters of the Garrison in their day.

Walking out into the sunlight at the base of the hill, he now came to the perimeter of Aldershot town. To his front a roundabout, with flowers planted in its centre, spoked five streets outwards leading into and away from the town. Standing on the corner, to Urwin's right, was a building — the notorious Aldershot NAAFI club. During its heydays more beer and blood flowed there than even Dodge City had seen; but it was finally closed down when the Military Authorities found it 'too hot to handle'. Now it sat in weeds and dead grass, unoccupied and unwanted.

As he crossed into the town, the ex-Sergeant Major glanced towards another infamous landmark. This was a pub, whose name no one used; to the men of the Aldershot Garrison it was always called the 'Rat Pit'.

Some minutes later he approached an old friend, the plain unattractive Aldershot Railway Station. Over the years of his world-wide military career, it was normally always the last to see him leave and the first to greet his return.

Pausing for a moment to decide whether to phone his wife now or in London, to warn her when he wished to be picked up at Norwich with the car, he chose the latter, carrying on into the station entrance. At the ticket window he handed in his last connection with the Army, an issued military railway travel warrant.

On the platform, he dropped some coins into a small box, in payment for a paper he selected from several, piled on a low unattended trolley. Finding a shaded area at one end of the platform, he placed his grip at his feet to read the headlines.

Urwin, forty years old, his sandy blond hair now greying at the temples, with thin crows' feet beginning to spread from the corners of his eyes, still stood to his full height of almost six feet. Thicker around the waist than when he first joined the Army, twenty-two years before, but only fifteen pounds heavier, he now found himself here on this familiar platform being reminded of old memories. This was understandable, for his Army years had been filled with so many sights, sounds and incidents — most happy, many funny, others serious and dangerous. As yet, there was no need for him to concentrate very hard, in order to still see clearly the faces of friends in death, and those of men he was about to kill.

Over the station loud-hailer, a warning was broadcast that the London train would shortly be arriving. Folding his paper, Urwin looked down the line to see its front carriage approaching from the direction of Farnham.

As he pulled open the door to a non-smoking compartment, the public address system again crackled out, informing those who did not already know, “Aldershot, this is Aldershot.”

CHAPTER 2

"Aldershot, this is Aldershot."

Standing with his head out the window as the train came to a halt, Dave Urwin pushed the door catch free to step onto the station, dragging his suitcase after him. Realizing he was on a detached platform, he followed the light stream of passengers who were disappearing down a set of steps. With his young eyes trying to look everywhere at once he almost stumbled, caught unawares by its first-drop.

At the entrance Urwin handed his ticket to the collector asking, "What is the best way to get to the Parachute Depot?"

"Ask that lad there son, I've just told him," was the abrupt but polite reply, as the collector pointed with one hand, while reaching around him for more tickets with the other. Urwin quickened his pace to catch a dark-haired youth as he passed through the outside door.

"The ticket collector back there said he told you the way to the Parachute Depot," began Urwin, bringing them both to a halt.

"Aye, that he did," came the reply in a brisk Scottish accent. The young man, no older than Urwin's own eighteen years, was well-built, but a few inches shorter, with bright brown eyes that smiled from a country-tanned face. Finishing their short conversation they exchanged names and homes: Dave Urwin from Belfast for Jim Sinclair, Lanark.

The two youths turned into the near-by bus station, for this was the direction the Scot had received: take any bus going up Queen's Avenue then ask to be put off at Maida Barracks. After a few moments, Sinclair spotted a bus inspector who pointed out a waiting double-decker. A seat close to the door was chosen, for the female clippy promised she would give them a shout at the correct stop. Although not admitted both were glad of the other's company, for apprehension had been taking its toll with each.

Urwin had a good idea of what he was getting into; his Uncle had been in the Parachute Regiment during the war. He had grown up listening to all his stories, mostly on a Saturday night when he returned home with his father after both had a good drink in them. His father listened as well, for during the war he had been held at the Harland and Wolfe shipyard; being a tradesman, he could not be relieved to the forces. This was the way that Urwin was going as well,

following his father as an apprentice in the same shipyard. His decision to leave and join the Army was a gradual one, but one that he would not be shaken from. His father tried to argue that he was throwing away the opportunity of a trade and a secure job, which was right, but how do you tell your father the reason you wanted to leave was because you didn't want to end up like him, tied to a mundane job in a dark, dreary shipyard?

"That will be thru'pence each," said the clippy, holding out her hand. Both reached into their pockets; Urwin's hand came up first.

"Here you are love, for both of us." The clippy took the tanner piece, cranking two tickets out of her machine.

"You won't forget about our stop," asked Urwin, holding his hand out for the tickets.

"No love, I'll give you a shout," she replied, moving further down the bus.

"To Dave, I'll pay you when we get off," thanked Sinclair. The Scot was trying to remember how much money he would have left after he had paid Urwin. On leaving home yesterday evening his mother had given him a pound note.

But most of that had gone in the pub outside Glasgow Central, prior to catching the train. His father had given him nothing — the reason for this was that he was still fuming over him volunteering in the first place.

"Why not wait until you are called up? That way you will only do two years. Or if you must volunteer, why not join the Cameronians, then you will at least do your training in the depot just outside the town."

Sinclair kept his reply down to a simple, "Don't fancy that. Want to jump out of airplanes."

This was only half true. He, like Urwin, was at the age of discontentment; he also wanted to get away. Aldershot, when he heard the Parachute Regiment was stationed there, sounded to start with a far enough step in the right direction.

As the bus began to climb Hospital Hill towards Queen's Avenue, they looked at the buildings and half-buildings of old vacant barracks on either side of the street. This was the beginning of the Army's re-development and re-building programme. As you enter Aldershot by its main road routes, signs will greet you saying: 'Welcome to the Home of the British Army', and so it had been for over a hundred years. However, it was now decided that those hundred year old

barracks would have to go. What Sinclair and Urwin were looking at was the first to be demolished. The barracks on the left were still up but empty; those on their right, although partly down, had housed the 5th Battalion, who left them eighteen months earlier to sail for Cyprus. Urwin stared at this half-destroyed barracks not realizing that this was the faint beginning of a link with the 5th that was to last for the next twenty-two years.

At the top of the hill the clippy began signalling to them that this was their stop. Both stood, collecting their cases, then left the bus with a thank you to the girl as it came to a halt. As the bus pulled away, the two eager but apprehensive soldiers looked around them. Neither expected a brass band but they had at least hoped for a sign telling them directions. On either side of the road were many red-bricked Army buildings, but nowhere was there any indication that a part of this complex was the depot of the Parachute Regiment. Sinclair reached the right decision first, “We had better ask someone.” Then, flipping a mental coin, “Here let’s try across there.”

Urwin followed his lead into one of the barrack areas, where a soldier appeared walking up a side road.

“Hi chum, we’re trying to find Maida Barracks,” hailed Sinclair as the soldier approached.

“This is it,” came a reply.

“Can you tell us who we report to? We’ve just arrived to join up,” Urwin added.

The soldier wore a pair of overalls heavy with dirty grime, his hands black with grease. “Down here,” he replied, jerking one hand over his shoulder, in the direction he had come.

The Recruit Company Office turned out to be an old wooden hut. Two young soldiers looked up as they entered. One sat at a desk tapping a typewriter, the other reading a pocket comic. The room was plain with bare wooden walls. Against the far wall sat the comic reader on one of several folding chairs; an iron stove rested unlit in a far corner. The soldier at the desk waited until Urwin and Sinclair had both entered the room. He didn’t ask with words, however. His chin pushed out and upward and with a slight raising of the eyebrows it was plain to both he was asking, ‘who are you, and what do you want?’

“We have come to join up. A bloke up the road said we had to report here,” said Sinclair, putting his suitcase down, to slip his hands into his pockets.

“OK,” replied the soldier, standing up.

He crossed to an open door. Standing in its entrance he gave a little knock on the frame, then pulling himself half to attention spoke into the room. “Two more just arrived Sir.”

After a pause, from inside a voice answered in a sharp manner, “Right, let’s have them in then.”

The soldier turned to the new arrivals, signalling with one hand for them to come towards him.

“Come into the Sergeant Major’s Office, he’ll see you now.”

Passing into the room Urwin read the blue wording on a small maroon board fixed to the door: CSM Recruit Company. Sitting at a desk was a man in his late thirties, stockily built, square shouldered, with blue eyes and thinning brown hair. Both arms were resting on the desk top to his front; on one wrist was a watch, on the other a buckled leather band with a gold crown the size of a two-bob bit.

“Right lads,” he began, “I’m Sergeant Major Broadhouse and I’d like to welcome you to the depot.” Then, looking at Urwin, “Have you come far?”

Urwin told him, giving a brief run-down on his trip. It was followed by a similar statement from Sinclair.

“So you both travelled overnight? You must be tired. Well I’m afraid you will be busy for the rest of the day, but you’ll have a chance for a good kip tonight. What we’ll do now is hand you over to my clerk, so he can take your details. Then you will be taken up to one of the billets to meet the Platoon Sergeant of the platoon you will begin your training with. Any problems?”

Both gave a ‘no’ in reply.

“Good, then just one more point before I send you off.” The Sergeant Major sat more erect in his chair; losing his fatherly expression, he levelled a stern gaze from one young face to the other. “I would like to make it clear to you that you are joining the Parachute Regiment. We set a far higher standard than the rest of the Army, but we will not be asking you to bleed for us. What we don’t want is a quitter, so I hope I won’t be seeing you back in this office in the near future filling out an application for transfer.” With no pause for breath he now began the two recruits on their first steps to a busy day. “Right, off you go.” Then with a shout, “Taylor! They’re all yours. When you finish with them, have the runner take them up to ‘C’ block — Sergeant Allander’s Platoon.”

“Right Sir. OK you two, come back in here.” This from the desk soldier who now identified himself as the Recruit Company Clerk. After he had extracted several bits and pieces of personal information from the two new arrivals, they were told to follow the Company Duty Runner. The comic reader stood up, pushing his book into a pocket, then without any signal or word he opened the door, disappearing outside. Urwin and Sinclair quickly followed to find him standing beside a tree, looking over his shoulder with a pained expression on his face.

“How far are we going?” asked Sinclair, looking into the runner’s spotty face.

“Just up the hill a little way. It’s the top floor of the third one up,” was his reply, pointing at the row of two-storey brick billets they had passed a few moments earlier.

“What’s it like here?” asked Urwin.

“Bloody hard,” came the answer from Spotty Face, who was holding his eyes to the asphalt surface.

“What’s so hard about it?”

“Everything. A couple of weeks was enough for me; I’m off, waiting on a transfer to the Engineers.” Spotty Face looked up to smile. Turning the corner of ‘C’ block, he led the way towards the entrance to the barrack’s top floor.

Inside, a sharp right turn took them up a straight flight of concrete stairs to the landing. At the top, Spotty Face passed through a door just beyond the steps. As Sinclair and Urwin reached this door they could see he had stopped in the position of attention, watching a colourfully dressed soldier who stood, his head held high and upright, in the centre of the room facing away from them. The soldier — tall, with neatly trimmed blond hair — looked every inch a paratrooper. On his head he wore the maroon beret, across his chest and back a red sash, angled from his right shoulder around his body to rejoin a tassel at his left hip. The pressed shirt was coloured a light brown, while his knife-edge creased trousers were also brown but darker, the cuffs of which were tucked into canvas gaiters that circled his ankles just above leather soled boots which reflected like black chrome. His belt was of leather, but painted in a matt white, and although unseen was fastened with a plain round brass buckle. With his arms locked behind his back, he held trapped under one armpit, a short wooden cane — its tip and knob also of brass.

The barrack room furnishings were Spartan: single cot beds, steel lockers and a number of plain wooden folding chairs and tables. The

floor of rough wood showed signs of an attempt with polish but a failed effort, while the walls, painted a pale grey over brick work, had long ago lost the memory of the brush that had put it there. Throughout the room young men were occupied, mostly in a sitting position on beds or chairs, polishing, brushing, or sewing. As the colourful soldier turned with a casual inspecting eye, three V-shaped Sergeant's stripes came into view on his right shirt sleeve, above which was set a small badge of twin blue wings extending from a white parachute. On seeing the runner standing to attention inside the room, the Sergeant's face took on a serious expression, but he allowed himself a half-smile as he spoke, "What can I do for you Holt? You decrepit thing."

"I've just brought up two new ones to join your platoon, Sergeant," Holt answered.

"Have you?" replied the Sergeant. "Well, I hope you didn't get too close to them. I wouldn't want them catching what you've got. Alright, off you go, I'll see to them." The Sergeant began to step forward, removing the cane from under his arm to wave Holt out. Then raising his voice he looked beyond the door at the two new arrivals, "Right you two, in here." Now using the cane to wave them in, with the same movement that he had ushered the runner out with.

On arriving in front of the Sergeant they found him standing with his legs apart, resting the tip of the cane on the floor, with both hands relaxed on the brass knob. "What are your names?" came the first question.

Each replied, one-worded and quickly.

The Sergeant then took a deep breath — he had a lot to say, "Right, my name is Sergeant Allander and you will address me as Sergeant from now on. You are in my platoon and will remain in it for the rest of your basic training. Each platoon is numbered — ours is 770 Platoon — remember it. At the moment we are in the process of forming up. Some of these people," arcing his cane around the room, "have been here for two weeks. We will be kicking off as a platoon to begin our training on Monday morning. As it is Friday today you haven't much time to get your kit ready, so over the next three days you will have to work hard to catch up with the others. What we will do with you now is get you a bed, get you settled in, then have you collect your bedding. With luck you may be able to draw your kit from the stores before lunch as well." He paused to glance at his wristwatch, then looked up through the doorway hoping to see someone. Disappointed, he instead disturbed a young man sitting on a bed by the door polishing something.

“Goodwin, go find Corporal Thomson and ask him to come here. He should be down in the centre room.”

“Yes Sergeant,” came a dull reply, as the youth casually stood up laying his polishing on the bed.

“Double, Goodwin, you evil little creature.” Sergeant Allander’s raised voice brought instant motivation. Goodwin gave another clearer and louder, “Yes Sergeant,” before dashing through the door.

Shocked, it took Urwin a few seconds to recover from the blast of the Sergeant’s voice. For Allander had leaned forward on his shoulder, to shout his second set of directions to Goodwin. The Sergeant now turned a full circle, pointing his cane at odd individuals.

“Come on, come on, keep at it. Those boots still need more work on the uppers Saunders. Look at those mess tins Cousins, they are nowhere near the standard we will require for Monday morning.”

Throughout the room heads went down, with hands beginning to resume small circles. As a voice spoke behind them, Urwin and Sinclair turned. “You want me Sergeant.”

Through the door came a soldier with dark hair and eyes, about Sinclair’s height, but with a heavier build. His manner was confident, holding the Sergeant’s gaze with self-assurance.

This however, was not what impressed the two new recruits.

What their eyes took in with admiration was his dress: the maroon beret, with its Regimental cap badge — which they only just now examined to reveal that it was of a bright silver metal, and which first gave the impression that it was a cross but on closer inspection, the centre piece turned out to be a parachute with straight-lined modern wings. Around the soldier’s neck was a camouflage netted scarf, tucked in as if it were a cravat. His jacket was also camouflaged, patterned in indiscriminate blotches of green, brown and sand yellow; these, however, were blended in many different shades, which gave the wearer a striking appearance. Its front had four large pockets, while at the back hung a tail flap which passed below the crotch of the trousers, to button on the underside of the front either side of the zipper. The trousers, an olive green cotton, were tucked into and allowed to hang over cloth puttees wrapped around the ankles. The boots — black, but not glistening like his Sergeant’s — were brush polished, the soles of which were rubber, giving the Corporal (for two stripes could be seen on the right arm of his smock) a relatively silent entrance into the barrack room. Considering the standard of British Army uniforms of the day, this was a very smart dress.

“Yes Corporal Thomson, another two have just arrived. Take them down to one of the lower rooms and find them beds. Then either you or Corporal Kettler get them up to the bedding stores. While you’re there see if they can draw their kit from the Colour Sergeant before lunch.” Allander paused to again look at his watch, “Where is Corporal Kettler?”

“He’s probably taking a late NAAFI break,” answered the Corporal with no hesitation.

“Right, you two pick up your gear and follow the Corporal.”

Thomson, without a sign, led the way through the door. Not looking around he began to point to left and right, explaining the set-up leading off the hallway.

“That’s the Blanco room.” Right arm points to a door on the right. “That’s the sinks for washing and shaving.” Another right arm. “Bath.” Left arm. “And toilets.” Right arm. The next room was similar to the last, except the entering of it — once through the door — took you down three steps, as it was on a lower level to the first. Halting at the second set of beds, Thomson turned to Urwin who was following him into the room. “Here, you take this one,” he said, pointing to a bed on the left. Urwin stood next to it, not really knowing what to do. “You take that one there,” directing Sinclair to the third bed on the right, next to the room’s fireplace. The Corporal gave both new arrivals a quick set of instructions about unpacking their cases, putting the contents into their lockers, and not drifting away, as he would be taking them to collect the bedding shortly.

They put the suitcases on top of the bare springs of their cot beds. Sinclair unbuttoned his coat intending to hang it up in his own locker. As he reached for the handle of the locker door, a voice with a Liverpool accent stopped him.

“That’s mine mate, yours is dat one over there.”

Sinclair froze for a second looking at the speaker, a young man slim, with ginger hair, and a sharp featured face that gave an unfriendly stare, as he sat on the next bed making small circles with an orange duster around a boot.

“Sorry mate,” apologized Sinclair, moving around his bed to the other locker. He opened the two doors, then draped his coat on the bed springs — no coat hangers. Neither Urwin nor Sinclair had much in their suitcases, but once it was transferred into the lockers each looked at the other, then around the room, the contents of which were identical to the first. Even the men and youths looked the same — mostly youths, but there were two or three who were old enough to be

called men. Their occupation was also the same as the others in the first room, some standing but most sitting while brushing or polishing.

“You can put your suitcases under the bed, that’s the best place for it.” This came from a round-faced youth with brown hair, who had been sitting on his bed opposite Sinclair’s, tapping metal studs into the leather sole of a boot. Reg Berrill introduced himself, then followed it up with a quick, “What do they call you?”

After answering, Urwin moved around his bed to sit on the springs facing the other young man.

“You two just arrived?” was Berrill’s next question. “Aye,” answered Sinclair, stepping across to stand at the foot of the bed.

“You been here long?” asked Urwin, hoping to hear something encouraging.

“I arrived on Monday, but I hate it already,” was Berrill’s deflating reply.

“Why, what’s so wrong?” pressed Urwin.

“Well I’ve been working on this bloody kit ever since, and Allander’s still not happy with it. Every time he comes in the room he finds something wrong,” Urwin was about to ask more, but had seen Corporal Thomson re-enter the room, through a door at the bottom of the billet.

“OK, you two, I’ll take you up to get this bedding now,” he said as he passed on his way towards the exit door.

“Will we need our coats?” Asked Urwin, looking out of a window at the cloudy sky.

Corporal Thomson stopped at the foot of the steps to look back. With half a smile beginning to appear he answered, “No Paddy, you’re OK like that. If it starts to rain we’ll all run like hell.”

Urwin rose slowly from the springs to follow Sinclair. At the head of the stairs, Corporal Thomson stopped to greet another Corporal coming up, taller than Thomson by a few inches, thinly built, with light brown hair. Urwin and Sinclair couldn’t help hearing the conversation.

“Allander’s been asking for you,” said Thomson.

The other Corporal’s face dropped slightly, and he hurriedly asked, “What about?”

“Just wondering where you were.”

“Oh, fuck him,” said the other Corporal defensively, “I’ll tell him I was up at the tailors. Where is he now?”

Thomson, starting down the stairs, directed a thumb over his shoulder, leaving the second Corporal now with a pale expression, taking short jerky steps towards the barrack room door.

Outside Urwin had guessed right, a light rain was just beginning to drizzle. The two recruits hurried to catch up with the Corporal who, without trying, was setting the others a brisk pace. Thomson used this journey to orientate his charges to the barracks. Stopping at the edge of the block, he pointed down the slope that Urwin and Sinclair had just walked up some minutes earlier. “That’s the RSO’s office.” This was a wooden hut sitting on its own in the sea of asphalt that covered all the spaces within the depot complex.

Swinging his arm to the right, away from the line of billets he continued, “That’s the recreation room — TV if you want to watch it. Around the corner is the NAAFI; this is the cook house in front of us,” now pointing to a long wooden building just a few metres to their front, “and behind that the MI room.”

Urwin looked at Sinclair forming ‘MI room’ with his lips in silent exaggeration. Sinclair returned this look with a shrug. Turning up the hill, Corporal Thomson resumed the journey and the tour, extending his left arm towards a wooden building with a railed veranda. “This is the Orderly room.”

As they began to cross a street, the Corporal stopped, facing to his left. “As recruits this is the most dangerous part of the barracks for you,” he began. “You are not allowed to walk up here unless you are involved on an official detail.” The area of street didn’t look that important. No more than twenty-five metres long, to end as a T-junction at another street, with what looked like more barracks beyond.

Pointing, the tour continued from bottom left to top left. “That’s the CO’s office, Adjutant’s office, RSM’s office.” All one long wooden building. “The Armoury is at the top.” A red brick building. The Corporal now swung his finger across the street to work his way back down the right side. “That’s the guard room and this is a class room.”

The new arrivals never looked at the class room — the guard room was far too interesting. Like most of the camp it was ancient brick. However, this one had a porch, with metal pillars and a single pipe railing. Outside the entrance stood several well-cared for white and brass objects, one of these brass objects was a bell hanging from a green painted housing.

Someone wearing only a shirt, trousers and boots was polishing the already shining curves of this bell, watched closely by a Corporal dressed in the same manner as Sergeant Allander, minus the red sash, but with a black arm band with the red letters RP on it. This was one of the Regimental Police who were responsible for the guard room and anyone who should be placed in their care, to occupy the cells within.

Unseen, but rousing inside, squatting behind his desk, was the Corporal's boss: Provost Sergeant Andrew Fraser, a demented Glaswegian dwarf, with black, grey-streaked hair and dark complexion. His forehead was broad and wrinkled, with heavy greyish eyebrows and puffy facial skin, which also hung down in drooping jowls. He normally lurked around the depot in a vulture-like hunch. Needless to say his nature matched his appearance, which undoubtedly made him the ideal man to hold this thankless post.

With a, 'come on', the Corporal again turned up the hill. Journey's end was another wooden hut, with a set of steep plank steps.

Colour Sergeant Gaskell looked up from his desk as Corporal Thomson, closing the door, braced his outstretched arms on the counter to his front. The Corporal grinned across at. the Colour Sergeant, awaiting the older man's first words of greeting.

"Well Corporal Thomson, what have you come to pilfer from my stores this time?" The stores referred to were spread throughout the room behind him in bags, boxes or stacked neatly on metal and wooden shelving. Mostly clothing or equipment, but also picks, shovels and numerous other assorted military items.

"I don't need to steal from you Colour, if I want anything I'll take it off that wanker Jones," replied Thomson, still retaining the grin. The Colour Sergeant leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands behind his head, also smiling. The banter between the two was not the way in which a Company Quarter Master Sergeant or a Corporal in the Parachute Regiment normally addressed each other, but he took no offence to the remark about his storeman, who he knew to be a wanker anyway. These two men had jumped from the same aircraft into Suez, chased EOKA terrorists up and down the Kyrenia Mountains, and fermented together for six months in the Jordanian desert, backing up the young King Hussein.

"I won't have you slag a credit to the Regiment, and my trusted number two, Corporal Thomson. Now either state a reasonable request or I'll bounce your ass down those steps."

Corporal Thomson pushed himself upright off the counter with his grin spreading even wider. "I got two new recruits outside Colour. I'd

like to collect bedding for them if I could, and Sergeant Allander asked is it possible for them to draw their kit before lunch?"

The Colour Sergeant, releasing his hands, then leaning forward to rest them on the desk replied, "The bedding you can have, Jones is across in the store now," nodding his head in a left direction. But the kitting-out will have to wait until after lunch, I'm late with this ration return," slapping a large white paper sheet on the desk in front of him. "And the Quarter Master is screaming for it. Bring them back at one forty-five, I can dish it all out then."

"Right Colour, one forty-five."

"OK, you two, over here," he directed, with an underhand wave after jumping down the last three steps.

Urwin and Sinclair followed the few metres to a building that was a twin to the last.

"Wait here, I'll call you in one at a time," said Thomson, climbing to the door. Inside he found Jones, an overweight slob of a storeman who was counting pillowcases.

"Give us two sets of bedding Jones, I've got a couple of recruits outside," demanded Corporal Thomson.

Jones paused in mid-count to throw down the last handful. Turning towards the counter he picked up a bedding sign-out book from a desk, looking at the Corporal all the while with mild hatred in his eyes. Corporal Thomson knew what that meant, he had achieved his aim, he had succeeded in losing the storeman's count.

"What's their names?" asked Jones, leaning on the counter poised over the book with a Biro.

"One of you, up here now," shouted the Corporal over his shoulder.

Sinclair ran up the stairs and through the door. After Jones had written his name in the book he reached for a neatly stacked set of bedding laid out on the floor with several others. Pushing it across the counter to Sinclair, he then offered him the pen with a, "Sign here."

"Just a minute," interrupted Corporal Thomson. Removing the blankets, sheets and pillows he opened out the canvas mattress, then finding what he had been looking for, he pulled the mattress into his arm and threw it at Jones driving him back against his desk.

"If you ever try to sting any of my Platoon with a pissed mattress again you little fat bastard I'll make you eat the fucking thing."

The arrival back at their billet was a breathless one. The bedding had not seemed too heavy on leaving the store; however, the wide grip needed to hold the mattress and blankets against the body, soon became tiring.

Corporal Thomson quickly gave them their first lesson in Army bull — that of making the bed block. He chose Urwin's bed as his example. "Now watch this, I'm only going to show you once."

The Corporal began his demonstration. A grey cotton mattress cover was slipped over the fibre stuffed mattress, then placed on the springs of the bed. A blanket with the corners snipped off was draped over the mattress to be tucked in, in a manner that allowed the edges and corners to remain firm and sharp. Three blankets and the sheets were now folded to a width of about two feet, then stacked alternately to resemble a two layer sandwich. The last blanket, once folded longways, was wrapped around the sandwich to enclose its top, bottom and sides in a square woollen shell. After completion, this was placed at the head of the bed, with the two pillows stacked on top. Corporal Thomson stepped back, looking from one mildly puzzled face to the other.

"This is what you will do to your bedding every morning on getting up. Any problems?" Two heads shook in reply. "Right, now both of you do it. You have plenty of time before lunch," ordered Thomson, reaching forward to destroy his recent achievement by casting the bedding to the floor. Our two apprentices set-to with a will, but could only produce limp facsimiles, where the Corporal's example was square and level, theirs were round and wrinkled.

Even Reg Berrill, assisting with his hard-earned experience of the last four mornings could only level the odd bump. Play was finally brought to an end by Sergeant Allander ordering everyone across to the cook house for lunch. Reg told them to bring the knife, fork, spoon and mug they had also drawn from the bedding store, and to follow him.

Despite the light drizzle a large queue had formed at the cook house. Most wore the working dress — shirt and denims — while others wore the more formal brown battle-dress uniform.

As the queue shuffled its way up the steps into the dining hall, it broke into two — one arm continuing on to a hot serving area, the other forking off to where cold dishes could be selected.

For Urwin this was one of his uncle's warnings of impending doom dispersed. He had told many tales of the poor quality of grub forced upon him during his service. However, both these selections were

materializations of colour photographs Urwin had only seen in magazines. The cooks in their spotless whites were ladling out portions across the hot plate from trays and pans, of chops, chicken, braised steaks and other choices. To fill the rest of the plate were steaming containers of chips, roast potatoes, carrots, cabbage and cauliflower. The cold table was equally impressive; not only was the presentation and decoration of the food attractive, what was on offer tempted many from the hot queue. Cold roast beef and pork legs awaited only a nod from the recruit, for a knife-poised cook to slice off thick rounds of meat, while a whole salmon was quickly being cut into segments and transferred to out-stretched plates.

Urwin sat down beside Berrill to stare at the full plate he had just placed on the table. 'Wait until I see that uncle of mine,' he thought, 'will I give him a mouthful. He had me thinking I would be down with beri-beri within a week.'.

After refilling mugs of tea to take across to the billet, the recruits sat on their beds holding conversations until the tea was drunk, whereupon hands reached out for dusters to return the room once again to its unending treadmill of chores. Shortly afterwards Corporal Thomson arrived to catapult Sinclair and Urwin into this world of magic little circles.

At two-thirty they stumbled back into the room, a sweating, confused pair of lads. Sweating from the weight of the clothing and equipment they had just collected and confused by the blur of articles they had finally signed for. Button stick was one name Urwin remembered; puttees, yoke and sea kit-bag were just three of the many names he hardly heard, let alone remembered.

Thomson watched the two beginners staring down at their bags and packs, that bulged with virgin gear waiting to be deflowered with Brasso, boot polish and Blanco. From eyes that were the only part of his face betraying the humour of the joke he had seen enacted hundreds of times, Thomson looked to the far end of the room. The man he had been searching for stood up from his bed, laying the inevitable orange duster down in answer to the call of, "Kyle, down here."

The man moved with a quick pace, for he knew the drill; respond promptly to all commands, that way the chiefs are happy and you stay out of trouble.

Sam Kyle, five foot nine inches tall, with light brown hair and dark eyes, was broad and solidly built, without the addition of excess body fat. His age was twenty-seven, but his face hinted of an inner

maturity, which for him was gained through the reluctant knowledge that life does not entitle you to a free ride to happiness.

This was his second time around; he had already served two years with the Parachute Regiment, mostly in Egypt in the canal zone, from 1952 to 1954. The last six years he had spent drifting from job to job, having got himself married in-between. He had now decided to rejoin the Army. He knew exactly what Thomson was calling him for, Kyle had been expecting it the moment the Corporal re-entered the room with Urwin and Sinclair.

"Kyle, show these two lads what they have to do with their kit, and what it needs to look like by Monday morning," directed Thomson.

Kyle gave an obedient reply, then to the recruits, "OK you blokes, leave your kit there and come with me."

The three arrived at Kyle's bed space, the last in the room on the left hand side. The older recruit reached for the two locker door handles, while speaking over his shoulder, "First of all, I'll show you just how your lockers should be laid out."

If shown Aladdin's cave, the jaws of the two new men could not have dropped any further. On each shelf military clothing, ironed and neatly folded was stacked centrally and dead even, as if measured off by a ruler — in fact it had been. From every corner of the locker the eye was dazzled by orderliness and shine. There were brasses that sparkled a golden light, boots that shone like black diamonds, water bottles and mess tins that gave off a bright aluminium gleam. The whole contents of Kyle's locker shouted from within that it was, 'Ready for inspection Sir!'.

Urwin looked back at his own crumpled and compressed gear lying in the kit bags on his bed. Sinclair summed it up for them both, "Christ!"

On returning to their bed areas, Kyle told them to empty the kit bag and begin laying it out in their own lockers, using his layout as their model. "Once you get it all inside, in its proper place, then I'll show you how to clean and polish everything," he informed them.

A voice began to shout from up in the hall, where shortly its mouth arrived in their doorway. It was the other Corporal who Thomson had spoken to at the top of the stairs.

"OK you bastards, outside in PT kit. *Now!"* This he shouted to the whole room, whereupon people rose off beds to throw orange dusters down and undress.

Corporal Thomson appeared at the bottom room entrance, "What's

that Corporal Kettler?" He asked.

"The gym had a period free so Allander wants me to take the platoon up, so this lot can have a little work-out," grinned Kettler.

Without replying Thomson turned back through the doorway to inform the occupants of that room, "OK lads, stop what you're doing, change into your PT kit then fall in outside. You're going up to the gym for some fitness training."

Urwin and Sinclair were caught in a wave of unknowing for some minutes, watching the rest of the recruits dressing themselves in red T-shirts and large blue shorts. Finally Sergeant Allander stabilized things for them, as he strode through the room by saying, "You two stay here and carry on sorting out your kit."

As Kyle trotted past he also eased their plight by telling them he had left his locker open so they could check that they were doing everything right. By the time the platoon had returned both men had hardly made a dent in the heap, each was trying to level from his bed. Despite frequent trips back and forth to Kyle's locker, they were constantly getting the layout wrong, and even their unpractised eyes could tell that what they had done was messy.

Once Kyle and Reg Berrill had stopped cursing their recent trip to the gym and changed back to the standard dress most of the recruits wore, of hairy shirt, denim trousers and rubber-soled boots, they too pitched in, sorting and folding.

Just as both beds were cleared, Corporal Kettler informed the room that it was time for all bastards to go across for tea. Sinclair, closing his locker door, reached for his mug and irons (as the knife, fork and spoon were referred to), commenting in a relieved tone, "Thank god that's finished."

Kyle stood waiting for him at the bottom of the bed with an unsmiling reply. "The work is still to be done Jock. I'll show you what I mean when we come back from tea."

Urwin now forgot the last few hours, losing himself in the expectancy of all the good grub he was about to eat.

On entering the cook house he was presented with just as big a shock with the quality of tea as he had been at the dinner. Only this time he was shattered over the lowering of standards between the two. Only one queue snaked its way past the hot plate, on which the choice was cold ham and fried egg, or toad in the hole, the only vegetables being chips and boiled peas. Unlike the lunch, when several different dishes of sweet were to be had, all there was if

wanted was bread and jam. It wasn't long before the recruits learned that the Army pulled out all the stops for dinner, while the other two meals were left to provide the soldier with a basic unattractive subsistence diet.

Back in the billet the men dragged their mugs of tea out as long as possible, no one wanting to begin the monotonous chores that awaited them and their orange dusters. Kyle told Urwin and Sinclair he would take them across to the NAAFI when it opened, so they could buy the articles that would enable them to clean and polish the dull objects they had laid out so carefully in their lockers.

"Buy what?" asked Sinclair.

"Your polish, Brasso and Blanco; and you'll need coat hangers as well," answered Kyle. "You don't think the Army is going to provide that do you?"

Sinclair went into a mental cocoon. He hadn't expected to fork out any money so early, he really did think the Army would have supplied all his needs. Cursing the lateness of the train that had caused him to enter the bar outside Central Station, he downed his tea with quick gulps.

Leading the way, Kyle stepped through the door of the NAAFI, into a darkened room. This darkness was not of poor lighting the dullness was reflected from the drab walls, curtains and floor. The contents were also of little attraction: several four foot wooden tables, each surrounded by a set of chairs, one dart board and a juke box which was playing Lonnie Donnegan's recent hit record 'I want to go home'.

Stepping up to the counter to be served, Dave bought two of everything Kyle told him to, for Jim Sinclair had explained his poverty, and asked a little sheepishly if he could go on tick to him. After the total was read out by the bored NAAFI girl, surrounded by her three day old rolls and buns, Sinclair took note of his share, then mentally added on the threepence bus fare. His father was not well off, it was only an average-sized farm, but like most farmers of the Upper Clyde Valley, he was in debt to no man and proud of it. 'What a way for his son to start a new career,' he thought, 'begging from his mates.'.

Kyle spent the rest of the evening in explaining and demonstration of what pattern the hob nail studs are to be driven into, in the leather sole of the drill boots; the fitting of their fifty-eight pattern battle equipment; and where to apply the damp greenish sand-coloured paste known as Blanco — on the waist belt and canvas ankle straps called gaiters. Urwin found the belt and gaiters the worst to work

with. The belt had brass ends with two brass buckles at the back that presented the problem of which did you wish to end up with — Blanco on the brass or Brasso on the Blanco! However, the gaiters were the real pig. About six inches high, secured around the ankle by two small leather straps which fed through equally small brass buckles. The canvas was first coated in Blanco, then the brass buckles were Brasso-ed, and finally the leather straps were dyed black, then shined with boot polish. The dilemma facing all recruits was, how do you keep one messy task off the other?

Sam Kyle took all this nursing in his stride for he, along with two others with prior service, had been appointed senior soldiers — one for each room. At the moment he only had eight men in his room, which suited him fine. The first room to be filled was Andy Dawson's, who had just recently left the Middlesex Regiment and now had the top billet. The next filled was Jack Skinner's bottom one. Their job was to show all the new arrivals the ropes; in that way unnecessary constant supervision of the recruits was avoided by Sergeant Allander and his Corporal.

With luck, Kyle was hoping no more spotty-faced teenagers would appear to join this platoon. He knew the cut-off time was midday tomorrow, and as he already had eight in the room and was finding them enough of a handful, he was looking forward to keeping the other three beds in the room empty. It was a bind being a recruit again anyway, but at least he knew what he was getting into and didn't mind the added responsibility, for it gave him an excuse to stay in the billet during the evenings, and not, like some, to scoot off into the town 'on the beer'. This he would allow himself to do on Saturday night, when he intended to get good and sloshed one final time, before the platoon began its training. Then that was to be the end to it until he completed all his recruit phases. To this Kyle was firmly resolved; under no circumstances was he going to be back-squaded or failed.

As the evening dragged on, one by one the recruits cleared their beds, to turn it from the day's work-bench into something with sheets, blankets and pillows, that you slept in. Just after eleven the last man still up placed his shining boots in the bottom of his locker, then switched the room lights off.

No individual alarm clocks were needed in the depot; instead, a camp guard was always present, operating from the guard room: it being their job to maintain security, deal with any minor incidents that occurred during the night, and wake those who needed to be roused in the morning. The drill was a simple one, that the Army has been using

for many years. The guard wakes the Company Orderly Sergeant, who is normally a Corporal, and whose job it is to wake all the men in the barracks. How the recruits are roused depends on the individual Corporal; most hurry through the billets turning lights on and shouting; others with more imagination or sadistic natures, would allow themselves the time and effort to enjoy the job.

This morning Sinclair and Urwin were initiated with lights on followed by a shout — but not too loudly — from a Corporal with an unfamiliar cap badge. He was a member of the Royal Army Pay Corps, whose job it was to get his sums right, not to shout at men in their beds. The routine for the depot in the morning was a standard one that seldom changed: reveille at 6.30 when all recruits wash, shave and dress, after which the bed block is made. At 7.00 breakfast; 7.30 to 8.00 bed areas are swept and the room tidied up; at 8.00 every recruit in the barracks parades by platoons outside their billets to answer a roll call, before being marched onto the large square for morning Muster Parade.

770 Platoon was not yet an official recruit platoon, not until Monday morning, so they had a shortened version. The platoon formed into three ranks for Sergeant Allander to call out the names he read from a list, whereupon the individuals acknowledged by replying, 'Sergeant', in a babel of British accents.

Once this was completed, the Sergeant gave everyone two stern minutes on how no one's kit was ready for their first parade on Monday morning and that a lot of work today and over the weekend was still expected. With that the platoon was chased back up the billet stairs by Sergeant Allander's booming voice; and so the day's work began, the way it had ended, with Brasso, boot polish and Blanco. Within a few minutes of orange dusters appearing in hands, Corporal Thomson came down the steps followed by two young men in civilian clothes. Kyle looked up from the shirt that he was sewing parachute wings onto, to silently subtract two empty beds and add two more recruits onto his nursing roll. The beds assigned were the two nearest the entrance — the left hand man being next to Urwin.

After the Corporal's standard brief that Urwin had been through the day before, they also began to place their civilian belongings in lockers. He watched this action, identifying himself with their nervous manner. Both were young; seventeen, he was to learn. The youth next to Dave was thin but tall, with blond hair, a thin pale face and a large pointed nose. His mate — for it later turned out they had been at school together, and had decided to join the Regiment after being laid off by the same Birmingham works — was completely the opposite:

short, stocky, dark curly hair with a round dark face.

"The best place for your suitcase is under the bed," said Urwin who now, like the others, was dressed in hairy shirt, denims and boots.

"OK mate, thanks," replied Roy Adams, the taller one. Pushing his suitcase under the bed then moving around it, he asked Urwin, "How long have you been here?"

Shortly before lunch Kyle lost the last of his empty beds; just short of the noon deadline. William Alexander Kennedy joined 770 Platoon. Corporal Kettler led him through the room to be given the bed space next to Reg Berrill. Billy was average height, five foot six inches, but of firm build, without being stocky. His face was tanned and his hair brown, that looked darker because of the oil which allowed him to comb it in a duck-tailed back and James Dean front. A light coloured knee-length coat with a black felt collar covered his dark blue one-button suit. The shirt he wore without a tie; in its place was a Western-style cord and toggle, designed in the shape of a long-horn-steer's head. His trousers were of the creaseless stovepipe pattern, while his shoes were black winkle-pickers.

"Blimey there's not much 'ere, is there mate?" He commented in an unmistakable cockney accent, turning to Corporal Kettler after a quick scan of the bed and locker.

"There's enough for you to get by with, and from now on you call me Corporal," retorted Kettler.

"OK Corporal," replied Billy, now facing him with both hands pushed deep into his coat pockets, while beaming a wide smile, but with eyes that were homing-in for a kill. "By the way Corporal, who was that geezer with the funny stick I met?" asked Billy innocently.

"That was Sergeant Allander, your Platoon Sergeant. Now get what kit you have into your locker. I'll come and collect you here after lunch," answered Kettler, turning to leave.

"Is Sergeant Allander going to a party Corporal?" Asked Billy, again in just as innocent a tone.

The Corporal stopped to look back over his shoulder. "Party?" he asked, knowing he shouldn't have, the moment he did.

"Ya," pounced Kennedy, "with that red ribbon tied around him, I thought 'e might be going as the first prize, *Corporal."* Billy's wide smile had returned, but his last word was emphasized.

Kettler stormed up to Kennedy, poking him in the shoulder, his

sour face glaring down. “Recruits who take the piss out of the Permanent Staff don’t last long around here, remember that. Now get your kit into that locker.” The Corporal’s finger stopped poking to now point over Kennedy’s shoulder.

“OK Corporal,” replied Billy, pulling his hands from his pockets to hold up his only luggage — a towel in one hand, and a small washing and shaving holdall in the other. Without comment Kettler turned away, leaving the room. With Kennedy’s smile still remaining, he passed one last comment to the room before turning to his locker, “Cor, what a bloke.”

Private Kennedy didn’t step off on the right foot that day; in fact he placed it with some force squarely on others’ toes. Kettler we know about, but then there was the Company Clerk who had to return after lunch to ensure his name and details were correctly entered on the nominal rolls and parade states, and that the relevant departments would be in receipt of this information by Monday morning. Colour Sergeant Gaskell and his storeman had to remain to issue this one man his bedding and personal kit. Saturday afternoon was sacred in the Army; this was when the married men were taken shopping by their wives and the single men got pissed. The name Kennedy was noted by several people that day.

“Bloody ‘ell,” commented Billy as he stood over the heap of bedding, clothing and equipment that Corporal Kettler had just spread over his mattress.

“OK smart ass, get that little lot sorted,” leered the Corporal. Then offering no more assistance left the room. Billy didn’t expect help from him, so the steeling of his intention not to let the Corporal get the better of him came that much easier. Sam Kyle took a deep breath, before pushing himself up from a sitting position off his bed. He had been watching Kennedy from the moment he returned with his double load of bedding and kit, and now knew what he had to do.

“Alright sunshine, there’s not much hope of you being ready for Monday morning, so we’ll give you a hand. Reggy, over here and you two as well.” Reg Berrill, Sinclair and Urwin approached Sam, “Leave your own stuff for now. This lad needs a lot of help, fast.” Without introductions Sam began to task everyone off, “‘Paddy’, start fitting his equipment; ‘Jock’ boots; Reggy belt and gaiters. I’ll do the locker layout.” Then, turning to Kennedy, “Now watch what I do, I’m going to show you how to sort your bed and make a bed block.”

Sam was holding true to his promise to himself. His third pint of half-

and-half rested on the counter of the Royal Public Bar. At one time he thought he wouldn't make it. Just after tea Kennedy, who had been trying to sew the waist of his denim trousers, stood up to throw his work onto the bed.

"'Ell I'm not sitting 'ere all night like a bleeding Rumpelstiltskin," he informed the room, "I think I'll take a walk down to the village for a quiet pint; anybody coming?" With this he threw his arms into the air, opened his mouth, then closing his eyes, began a good stretch and a yawn.

He opened his eyes, just in time to see Sam Kyle's right fist pass to the left of his nose. Sam caught him by his shirt front, before he slid all the way down his locker door. With the same shirt front, he was assisted back to the sitting position on the bed he had just left.

"You're going nowhere tonight my friend, you have far too much work to do," stated Kyle, shaking Kennedy firmly, while staring hard into his eyes to ensure that he understood.

Kennedy, recovering from the shock quickly, forced a smile onto his face before giving a cheeky reply, "OK cock, you know best."

Sam swallowing the last inch of his pint, pushed it towards the barman for a refill. That Kennedy was going to be his problem child. If anyone in the room was about to cause friction with the Platoon Staff it was going to be him. Still he learned a lesson tonight, he can come it with the Corporals if he likes, but he will have to do as he's told by Sam Kyle. While collecting the change from a two shilling piece he had used to pay for the fresh pint, one of the coins slipped between his fingers to freewheel in a short loop on the floor. Seeing it come to rest against a toe, he bent forward to retrieve it. 'Gotcha you little bastard,' he said to himself, straightening up.

"Hi Sam, took me six pubs to find you, watcha drinking?" Sam was staring into the now familiar, cheeky but honest smile of Billy Kennedy.

Two hours later both men were making their way back to the depot.

"Ya gotta get stuck into that kit tomorrow Billy," encouraged Kyle. "If you don't you'll find yourself in trouble."

"Sure Sam sure," Kennedy replied. The speech of both came slurred and disjointed from the combined effects of the drink, munching on chips and the effort of ascending Gun Hill.

Their performance was one that had been enacted by soldiers of the Aldershot Garrison for many past years. Senses distorted by drink,

bodies hunched forward to aid their climb, paper-wrapped fish and chips in one hand, poking this into their mouths with the other.

"You're green Billy, pretty soon you'll find the Army holds all the cards. The only way to beat them is to do as you're told. You listening to me now Billy?" Kyle, holding a piece of crusted fish ready to place in his mouth, had paused to ensure Kennedy was taking in his words of wisdom. Once his alcohol disrupted vision had assured him the young recruit was paying attention, he placed the fish in his mouth, while returning his eyes to the pavement. "If you really want to get through the depot here, the only way is to work hard, don't give up, and don't put the needle in on bastards like Kettler; he can give you a rough time if he wants to." Another check with unfocused eyes by Kyle.

"Sure Sam, I'll remember," assured Kennedy. Kennedy said it and except for the bit about Kettler, he meant it.

It had been a long time since he had done so much listening, and so little talking. As an East End Londoner it was unnatural for him to keep his mouth shut, but this evening he had. In the last few years only a handful of things had affected his life. After leaving school, his brother had taken him on as an assistant, working at his stall in Green Street Market. With this job, life then became centred around his mates, the local palais and West Ham football club. Home was with his mother and father in their council house. Unfortunately this style of living could not last; recently his world had begun to come apart: first the local palais was turned into a bingo hall, then his mates one by one were either called up or got married. The turning point came when his brother had to let him go because of his marriage. The new sister-in-law would be replacing him on the market stall. No one had to build a fire under Billy, he could read the signs; a change was needed and this meant a move — after watching West Ham's last home game of the season he joined the Army.

Kyle, finishing his last chip, pounded the paper into a firm ball, tossing it over the wire fence towards Talavera Barracks, where it came to rest with thousands of others. Sam then broke into song. He sang to the tune of a pre-Second World War melody, but the words were about a people and a place he had hated in the past.

"Saida — Bint I know you're not a virgin,

I know you like to have your fun and games,

Well you've spent all my money and smoked my duty-frees

And you left me all alone last night with L63s

But never mind I'll be right there tonight dear.

Tomorrow on a 252 I'll be,

But when I'm in the nick mush

There'll be no more shufti kush,

You're my little gyppo maid sequesquetir."

Kennedy did what he had been doing for most of the last two hours — he listened. This was why he had taken the chance of a busted nose, by seeking Kyle out at the pub. If he was to find out what this Army lark was all about, Sam Kyle would be the man to put him right.

Once over the crest of the hill, Kennedy began to make for the shortest route to the billet: one that led past the guard room. But Sam wasn't that drunk, taking charge to divert Kennedy and himself the long way round via Maida Gym; and so he proved to be right, for a loud shrill voice was heard from the direction of the guard room, intended for someone else either too new or too drunk to know better. "You there, what are you doing with your hands in your pockets? Come here — double!"

On entering their room they found a mild argument in progress.

"It's true I tell you, it's fucking true," stated Sailor Harris, now one of the platoon's recruits but late of the Royal Navy.

"But it just doesn't come out of the human body," argued a dark Southern Irish youth from County Wicklow.

"What's this?" asked Kennedy of Dave Urwin.

"Sailor says a fart can be set alight."

"What!"

"Aye, they've been at it for the last ten minutes."

"Right, right I'll prove it to you," exclaimed the ex-sailor, throwing up his hands. lust give me a while to work one up."

"You've been eating pickled onions all night so it shouldn't take dat long," pointed out the Scouse lad who occupied the bed next to Sinclair.

"Who's got a match? Come on, someone has to hold the light," demanded Harris, warming to the occasion with a theatrical voice.

"Here, I'll do it," said Sam Kyle, stepping forward with a sly grin on his face. The room now began to stir.

"Alright, alright stand back," commanded Sailor, "We don't want any of the audience going up in a puff of smoke." Harris began to

unfasten his trousers, allowing them to drop around his ankles, then sat on the end of his bed facing the recruits. “This might take a short spell lads, so make yourselves comfortable,” said Harris, turning to Kyle. “You got a lighter or matches Sam?”

“Lighter,” replied Kyle, placing a cigarette between his lips before showing Harris he was holding it in the palm of his hand.

“Good, well when I tell you to, hold the flame about six inches from my arse.”

For the next few minutes jokes were said, complaints about waiting made and assurances from Harris given. Then he stiffened while beginning to wiggle and twist his hips, as he leaned backwards with his arms braced on the bed.

“I think I got one coming,” informed the ex-sailor. “Yeh, and it feels like a good one,” he continued.

The platoon fell silent to lean slightly forward.

“Aye it’s coming, it’s coming,” declared Harris with the joyous expression of an expectant mother. “You ready Sam?”

“Yeh, ready,” said Kyle bending forward, cigarette in mouth, lighter poised.

“OK,” declared Harris, jumping off the bed to turn his back on the platoon, while bending forward at the waist and hooking his thumbs into his shorts. Looking under his arm pit at Sam Kyle, he commanded him to light the flame. “OK,” announced Harris, “here she comes.” Then tightening the necessary inner muscles he pushed his underpants down to his knees and broke wind.

It was apparent that this was Sailor Harris’s party piece, perfected over several years’ Naval service. The blue gas fuelled flame that was ignited by Kyle’s lighter was astonishing enough, but what sent the whole room into fits of laughter was the sight Harris presented them with. Legs apart, underpants around his knees — but the artificial addition that put the icing on the cake was the two human eyes tattooed on either side of his rectum, which gave everyone in the room the spectacle of a two-eyed, fire-belching ass-hole. Most people erupted in choruses of laughter, others shocked at first, then realising what they had seen, also began to laugh. Billy Kennedy collapsed in convulsions, rolling on the floor, arms wrapped around his rib-cage, roaring and gagging, while tears streamed down his cheeks.

CHAPTER 3

We few, we happy few,

We band of brothers;

William Shakespeare

Monday's reveille found several of the recruits fully awake long before the Company Orderly Sergeant came to rouse them. This morning the man on duty was a Corporal from the Physical Training Staff, whose job it was to build up the recruits' endurance in the gym, during runs and on marches. He was a believer in shocking recruits out of bed; first a large metal kitchen tray was thrown into the room, to clang and clatter its way along the floor ricocheting off bed legs and lockers; then, entering himself, he would fill the air with foul curses, directed at those who had not yet placed their feet on the floor.

After breakfast, each man was expected to complete a job in the billet that would contribute to its overall tidiness before the platoon went to morning Muster Parade. These room jobs were detailed by the Corporals and listed on the noticeboard, each having a letter which was placed beside a recruit's name, changing every week so that they all had a fair crack at the good and bad. These little tasks consisted of such things as dusting lamp-shades and window ledges, sweeping the centre of the floor, the hall and the steps. The bulk of the work was centred around the sinks, shower and toilet areas. The job not to have was the emptying of the platoon dustbin; this had to be completed and cleaned for the morning inspection, but could only be done last thing, after all the rubbish and sweepings had been collected.

Corporal Kettler detailed the tasks for this first week; Billy Kennedy had an 'F' beside his name — 'Fs' were on dustbins. At 0800 each recruit would be stood beside his bed awaiting the inspection by the Platoon Sergeant. Allander strode through the billet without a halt, but never missed a badly done job or an untidy object. Each time he spotted a discrepancy he pointed his cane at it, commenting to Corporal Thomson, who followed him with a note book, that this would be rectified and not happen again.

As soon as the inspection was completed all recruits were hurried outside to fall in, in three ranks, their dress: hairy KF shirt, Blanco-ed belt, maroon beret, gaiters, denim trousers and best boots (the leather-soled ones everyone had been bulling to a glossy shine). Once they

had been herded into three ranks to the satisfaction of the Corporals, Sergeant Allander told them to keep quiet and listen in. Then he began to address the thirty-nine recruits of 770 Platoon for the next five minutes in a loud clear voice.

It seemed they would not be taking part in the normal company Muster Parade as their platoon had not been instructed in the drill manoeuvres required. In fact they would not be taking part until the coming Saturday, and only then if they were up to an accepted standard. The billet inspection was also covered; it seems it was in a deplorable state but would improve tomorrow morning or some of the platoon would be on show clean. Not many of the men knew what that meant but they soon would.

Shortly after the Sergeant finished his talk, a tall blond Lieutenant approached, walking downhill from the Officer's Mess. Allander having seen him, stiffened, placing the cane under his left arm. With a quick command to the platoon to remain still, he turned towards the Officer, marched forward several paces to halt at attention, the metal studs and horse-shoe heel of his boots ringing off the barrack walls. With a salute which was returned, he informed the Officer the number of men in the platoon and that they were formed up and ready for inspection. Lieutenant David Ramsay declined the offer of the inspection. He realized it was the first day and that Sergeant Allander would be having a word about this later in the day anyway.

As he moved closer to introduce himself and give a short talk, he noted the disadvantage he had them at, not the obvious one of rank but appearances. Of the thirty-nine recruits only a few seemed to have mastered the technique of making the uniform fit the body; berets still not shrunk properly jutted over right ears like mini awnings, out-sized shirts hung off shoulders, trousers untailored and sewn at the waist ballooned out from hips to ankles.

In contrast, Ramsay was the picture of correctness. However he realised this gap in outfitting was one caused by money not choice. Ramsay, like all Officers, bought his clothing — the Private had to accept what was issued.

Once his talk was finished he handed the platoon back to Sergeant Allander with more mutual saluting. The men were then told their first drill lesson would now start, and it did. Sergeant Allander said he was about to teach them how to come to attention and stand at ease; he then proceeded to demonstrate, explain, then demonstrate again. Finally he made them attempt it themselves, then he had the whole platoon doing it together. As they came to attention everyone was to shout as loud as they could, 'in'; on standing at ease the shout was,

‘out’. As this was going on the two Corporals moved about the ranks checking for faults, Corporal Thomson giving helpful advice, Corporal Kettler swearing at everyone but mostly at Billy Kennedy.

For the next lesson that morning, they were chased into the billet to change into their weapon training dress. This meant they had to substitute the leather-soled boots for rubber ones, their gaiters for cloth puttees and to put on the camouflage jacket, the airborne Denison smock, and some of the green webbed equipment referred to as skeleton order: this consisted of the shoulder yoke, the waist belt with two front ammunition pouches, and two water bottle carriers containing aluminium water bottles.

Before the lesson could begin each man had to draw a rifle from the armoury, which was assigned to him for the rest of his time in the depot. The lesson they had was an introduction to the self-loading rifle or SLR. It was a magazine-fed, gas operated, semi-automatic weapon, firing a 7.62mm. bullet, and was to prove to be a beauty. Once finished, they were again rushed back to the billet to change, this time into the khaki battle-dress uniform. Under the supervision of Lieutenant Ramsay, the depot civilian tailor chalked alterations on most of these uniforms, then took them away for tailoring.

After lunch, the platoon spent two full lessons on more drill. This entailed more shouting by them, which was only accepted at the top of their lungs, echoing out of the barracks to be heard clearly in the streets beyond. The next period was not a lesson, but a welcome and introductory talk by the Commanding Officer of the depot, Lieutenant Colonel Stoppard MC. The Platoon was seated in the depot briefing room, which was large enough to hold well over a hundred people. At one end was an enclosed stage with a dais placed at one side. As well as 770 Platoon and their Staff, crowded into the room, occupying all chairs and overflowing to stand against the walls were the latest course of P Company — ‘P’ for Parachute Company.

The Parachute Regiment began to take direct enlistments of civilians in the last decade; however, the other units of 16 Parachute Brigade would only draw from the soldiers within their own Corps. These were the people who now made up this new course of P Company: gunners, drivers, engineers, signallers, cooks, medics — over a hundred in all, each with his own reason for being there. The national service men had a simple reason: money. Parachute jump pay would double their wages. Many amongst them were not from the Corps, but from other Infantry Regiments. These men were hoping to pass this parachute course, then after the qualifying jumps re-cap badge — that is, transfer into the Parachute Regiment. Few of these

parachute course students really knew what they had let themselves in for. At the end of the physically tough two weeks, only a handful would remain to travel to the RAF Parachute School at Abingdon. The rest would limp back to their parent unit, some in pain, others in disgrace. In fact the weeding out was so quick, each soldier was given a number which was painted to his trouser leg and helmet. This created the system where Private Jones and Captain Smith were not failed and RTU-ed (returned to unit); it was number 35 or 71 who was told to pack his kit and report to the Company Office.

The Company Sergeant Major of P Company suddenly called the room to attention; those in chairs sat up very still. Lieutenant Colonel Stoppard came into the room acknowledging the Company Sergeant Major's salute. Then with a, "Stand at ease please," he jumped up onto the stage, tall, in his early forties, with brown hair and a dark rugged face, the shirt sleeve dress fitting his casual manner.

"You have all come here to try and become parachute soldiers," he began, after introducing himself. "You won't find it easy. The only advice I can give you is don't give up. When you are lying in a crumpled heap and one of my Staff is stood over you telling you to get up and push yourself on, do it. You won't get any change from us if you start to whine instead. Tears don't win battles. I wish you all the best of luck." With that, he was off the stage and out the door, barely allowing the Sergeant Major time to call the room to attention.

Lieutenant Colonel Stoppard was not as flippant and off-handed as his short speech may have implied. Those letters at the end of his name were for gallantry. His Military Cross was awarded to him sixteen years earlier, during the Normandy invasion. After a night parachute descent, he had gathered together what he could of his platoon and marched them to the Company's objective: a battery of heavy guns the Germans were using to shell the invasion beaches. As the time neared for the Company attack, Stoppard realized that the only soldiers to make their way to the assault point were his eighteen men, leaving him now the Commander on the spot, with a weak platoon to carry out the task of taking a Company's objective. Forty minutes later, after the guns had been captured, only seven of his men were still standing, and he only because he was being held up by one of his soldiers (the bullet is still somewhere in his hip). No, Colonel Stoppard was not abrupt in his address; he had a message for men and he gave it.

The next event for 770 Platoon was a visit by all to the depot barber shop. No matter how neat the hair was, everyone took his turn in the chair. The platoon was to find that this would be a weekly

occurrence. As the recruits relaxed in their three ranks each awaiting his turn, most could see through the open door that only one slightly built, grey-haired but balding barber was at work. The people in the rear rank rocked back on their heels, annoyed about the long wait they were in for. However, not so; thirty-nine recruits, were in the chair and out again in twenty-five minutes. Most left the small shop testing with fingers the bare areas that had suddenly appeared above ears and neck. The barber was nicknamed 'the chop' — and could he!

The last period before tea, was one that would be enacted at the end of every day: Blanco-ing the webbed belt and gaiters. The Blanco paste would give the surface it covered a dull matt finish, but only as long as it was not scuffed, splashed or touched — even a good hard stare seemed to add stains. To dry it, the webbing was laid out on newspaper in the soldier's own bed space.

And so ended 770 Platoon's first full day of army training. After tea, the recruits were allowed out, but most stayed in to prepare the kit they would be called upon to use the following day.

On Tuesday morning the kid gloves came off. Sergeant Allander hit the billet like a thunderbolt, rifting both individually and collectively. Floors were swept again, bed blocks stripped and re-made, and the men responsible for those jobs in the toilet and washing areas were doubled back to re-clean, mop or brush. Rubbish was found in the platoon dustbin, which gave Billy Kennedy and another lad from the top room the distinction of being awarded the platoon's first show cleans. The casual affair of the previous morning's Muster Parade had now gone — Allander's voice had acquired a biting tone. Once the three ranks had formed, he had them coming to attention and standing at ease several times, with the accompanying chorus of, 'in' and 'out', from the recruits.

Lieutenant Ramsay's inspection was another hurdle to surmount. As he came to the front of each recruit they had to again come to attention and in a loud clear voice, state their army serial number, rank and surname. If the Officer noticed a minor point on individual appearance he would enquire as to why it had come about. If it was a clear case of irresponsibility he would turn to the Sergeant whose voice would boom into the offender's face threats of damnation, probably to follow with the phrase, 'show clean'. One poor fool had the mistaken gall to be stood in un-bulled boots. Allander showed no mercy!

"How dare you come on this parade with your boots in that state! Why haven't they been cleaned?" No halt for a reply, "I'll tell you why, because you would rather go out and fill your belly with beer. I

know because I can smell it on your breath. Well, I hope you enjoyed it because I'm going to ensure it's your last drink for a long time — 'show clean'!"

Corporal Thomson was kept busy that morning noting all the misdemeanours and writing down a correct list of the people who would appear on show clean, with the reason why. The next hour and a half the platoon spent on more drill, only this time they were marched across Queens Avenue to a small asphalt drill square, where Sergeant Allander could instruct the platoon in a more relaxed setting. This was followed by another rush as the men quickly changed into their red PT vests, plimsoll and long unattractive blue PT shorts. This was to be their first official physical training lesson. Dave Urwin was looking forward to this period; it would be a nice break from drill, and provide a short escape from Sergeant Allander's voice, which was becoming abrasive to his ears.

The moment 770 Platoon stepped through the gymnasium door it was taken by the throat. Three PT instructors, dressed in dark blue trousers, white gym shoes and white vest, directed them with screams and curses into the centre of the large wooden floor, every man being made to lie down, then get up quickly, several times. Next they were chased from one end of the gym to the other, followed by everyone running around in a circle trying to catch the man in front. Without a halt, squads were formed and challenges were presented, some had to climb ropes, others jump over boxes, while others did body exercises, five minutes of this, then the squads changed around.

The three instructors soon became very unpopular. One — tall and dark, with a hairy chest that reached his adam's apple — kept implying that because of their slow and untrained actions everyone was homosexual. Another dark-haired instructor also took up this theme, mimicking the recruits' actions with a shrill feminine voice. The third instructor of medium height with ginger hair, operated with a lowered voice, but one that always implied, 'do what I say or suffer the consequences'. The finale of this little work-out was a team game, in which three squads were lined up, then proceeded to compete against each other in some sort of running about; at the end of each phase the winning team had to finish with all members standing to attention. At the end of this session the platoon was chased out of the gymnasium doors, to form up in three ranks in front of Sergeant Allander, with chests heaving, all gulping in air like goldfish.

To Dave Urwin, the sight of his Platoon Sergeant and the sound of his voice was a blessing from Heaven. Over the last forty minutes he had hardly stopped moving, which now shocked him into the reality,

that passing out of this depot was not going to be a piece of cake.

On returning from tea, the people picked up that morning for show clean found themselves being sworn at by Corporal Kettler, who had been detailed by Sergeant Allander to ensure they paraded at the proper time, in the correct place, wearing the appropriate dress and showing the offending article. The time was 1800 hours; the place was in the street in front of and facing the guard room. As well as those from 770 Platoon, another dozen recruits from other platoons also paraded, each carrying the evidence of their crime. A Corporal of the Provo Staff, with his white belt and black RP armband, came out of the guard room. After bringing the recruits to attention he quickly called the roll, reading the names from a piece of paper clipped to a mill board. Once assured that everyone who should have been there was there, he began his inspection. Some he passed without comment, others were shocked to find he was not satisfied with their efforts, and that they would have to parade with the same article again, at Staff parade which was 2200 hours — again outside the guard room.

Some were in for an even greater jolt; having cleared the reason for the visit, the Corporal spotted something else out of order with the man — this meant the poor recruit would also have to appear that evening on Staff parade. The dustbin Billy Kennedy and his mate had carried up from the billet failed its inspection. Corporal Kettler received this news with a laugh, “Tough shit, you had better start getting your kit ready then, if you’re on Staff parade, you’ll have to be there in Christmas tree order.”

On hearing this news Sam Kyle took charge, showing the two rookies what Christmas tree order meant. Normally it would have been best battle dress, best boots and full battle equipment, but as their BDs were in the tailors, they had to substitute smock order instead. The full battle equipment had to be cleaned and assembled correctly, which meant all the skeleton order, plus the rear kidney pouches and poncho roll containing the poncho. Carried in the rear pouches the soldier had to have washing and shaving kit, a towel, PT vest, spare socks, spare leather boot laces, the two aluminium mess tins and knife, fork and spoon. After Sam had inspected all this for correctness and cleanliness, he showed them how the dustbin was to be bulled-up. The whole bin had to be scrubbed out with hot soapy water, then metal polish applied everywhere until the bin sparkled both inside and out. At 2200 hours the Orderly Officer of the day, who inspected Kennedy and Co’s dustbin passed it as satisfactory, which sent them both back to the billet happy but physically drained.

On Wednesday morning Sergeant Allander again found sweepings

in the dustbin. Billy couldn't understand it; he and the other recruit had held off till the last minute before emptying the bin, and only then after they had both asked around the rooms if there was any more rubbish. No matter — at the end of the day Kennedy and his mate would be on another 'show clean' and possibly a Staff parade as well.

The afternoon found 770 Platoon in PT kit, across the Farnborough Road. It had become a tradition in the Army that Wednesday afternoon would be the sports afternoon of the week. This was the time when people of all ranks would vacate billets, leave desks, come around from behind counters, and partake in their chosen sport. 770 Platoon's chosen sport for the day was to be a cross country race. The opposition would be 769 Platoon. They had already done this race once against 768 Platoon, and in two weeks' time 770 would host 771. The competition factor was only an added incentive to the men; the real reason for the race was to see what standard of fitness the individual soldier was at.

The physical training Sergeant Major, set the runners off with a blow of his whistle. Seventy-odd men rushed from the start line wearing plimsoll and blue shorts. 769 in white PT vest, 770 in red. Some sprinted to the front trying to gain the lead, others striding out in a determined set pace. Most were caught up in the main gaggle, having to accept the bumping and jostling until time pruned the weak away from the strong. The course was about four miles, the beginning of which was up the Fleet Road, running parallel with the Basingstoke Canal. This was the first test of the platoon on an individual basis, each man being left alone to show what he could do. Some gave up very early on, only running a few hundred metres, then finding it easier to walk — did so; others made of tougher fibre, gritted their teeth and plodded on doing the best pace they could.

Hogarth, the scouse sleeping next to Jim Sinclair, kept his legs going; he didn't intend to fail, for him the army was an escape, a place to lie low while things at home settled down. A letter had arrived from his cousin warning him that Patricia Brady's brothers had sworn to get him, and were now waiting for his return. The cow, thought Hogarth to himself, she had come across for half the street why hadn't she for him? The bitch had been taking his drinks for weeks, and the one night he had her out behind the local boozer she wouldn't play. He still figured he did the right thing, when he forced her against the wall, after smashing a stout bottle and threatening to ram it up her. It was worth the look on her face. He didn't mean to cut her hand, though she did that herself when she broke away from him.

Dave Urwin was one of the front runners, well behind the lead man but up with the first ten. This was something he had trained for, for his uncle had warned him — if nothing else — to get into the Parachute Regiment you had to run. The route was marked out by recruits from the depot, some pending transfer, others with injuries awaiting the healing powers of time. All were stationed at points where the route took a turn that might be missed. Around a corner Urwin came upon one of these markers waving him off the road up a sandy track. Half a mile on, he climbed to the crest of a small level hill. As he approached the opposite rim, he could see a bare sandy valley that stretched over a mile and a half away into the distance; this was Long Valley, a place he would get to know well. Through the centre of this the track continued as straight as a ribbon, on which the lead runners could be seen. Another mile of uphill tracks, then the route rejoined a metalled road.

While on the road the ginger-headed PT Corporal from the gym ran past him, propelled on two flesh covered pistons disguised as legs. As the Corporal encouraged him to keep it up, Urwin couldn't help feeling inferior. He had done quite a lot of running around the roads on the outskirts of Belfast, so he thought he was fit. Now this Corporal not only motored past him taking twice the pace he did, but did it wearing the heavy rubber-soled boots. At a turning off the road onto a dark earth track, he suddenly came upon the finish. As he passed through, the Sergeant Major who had started them off asked his name, then turning to someone holding a mill board informed him, "Urwin sixth."

Urwin had not gained a place in the first ten because he was a good runner, far from it — he had an average speed just one gear above jogging — what put him with the first arrivals was the fact that he had kept running. This was noted by the people whose job it was to note such things. The last man to come across the finish line, a short overweight youth from West Yorkshire, walked across the finish line even when the other competitors shouted for him to run the final short distance.

"Get stoofed, I'm fooked," was his reply and this was also noted.

Thursday morning more rubbish was found in the platoon dustbin. This time Sergeant Allander threatened the two recruits that if it happened again they would both be placed on report, and marched in front of the Company Commander. Kennedy's number two on the dustbin was close to a mental collapse, slouching in the middle rank, eyes becoming watery, his lower lip quivering uncontrollably. Billy wasn't about to crack, but these show cleans every evening were

beginning to wear a bit thin. He made up his mind to catch this late-comer with the rubbish who kept dropping him in it.

One period in the afternoon which most of the platoon found interesting, was Regimental History. As the recruits eased themselves into the rows of chairs in the depot museum building — surrounded by weapons, models of battlefields, photographs, maps, banners and flags, all items of the Second World War — a Colour Sergeant began his address. The young soldiers were told how the regiment was formed in 1940 after a suggestion from Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister, and how it expanded to over two full divisions. Once he had covered most of the major battles they were involved in, with the aid of the models and maps, he then went on to explain, how at the end of the war, Britain's Parachute formations were dissolved from the two divisions the 1st and 6th to form one brigade the 16th Independent. The number 16 chosen by joining the two divisional numbers together, in order to patronize the jealous rivalry that had sprung up between the two divisions, during the war. The Colour Sergeant ended by describing the formation of the brigade: the infantry was provided from four battalions of the Parachute Regiment — the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th. The supporting corps units of the brigade were the 33rd Royal Artillery Regiment armed with 4.2 inch mortars, 216 Squadron Royal Corps of Signals, 63 Company Royal Army Service Corps, 23 Field Ambulance Company, RAMC and 9 Squadron Royal Engineers, most other corps of the army were also represented, but in smaller ways.

There was a Royal Army Ordnance Corps Platoon responsible for the heavy dropping by parachute of vehicles and weapons. The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers who operated a workshop for the brigade. A Royal Military Police Company was also attached, in order to keep the men honest. Scattered on attachment throughout the major and minor units you would also find representatives from the Catering Corps, the Pay Corps, the Education Corps, even a section from the Army Intelligence Corps.

The Colour Sergeant finally finished by telling the recruits that the whole brigade was at present in station in Aldershot — except for the 5th Battalion who were doing a three year posting in Cyprus, and the 2nd Battalion on a four week exercise in Norway.

Friday morning found Billy Kennedy hiding in the Blanco room, with his eyes fixed on the dustbin across the hall. He had been there for ten minutes and was beginning to worry — Sergeant Allander would be around shortly forcing him to leave his stake-out position. Just as he heard the Sergeant's bootsteps ringing off the asphalt

outside the block, the door to Corporal Kettler's bunk opened. With a quick check to ensure no one was watching, he lifted the dustbin lid, then emptied a full ashtray into it. 'You bastard', thought Billy. He should have guessed though, that dustbin had always sat in the hallway just outside the Corporal's bunk. As soon as Kettler closed his door Kennedy nipped across the hall, picking up the dustbin he ran down to his bed space, under the curious eyes of the rest of the room, he emptied the butts and fag ash into a newspaper, hiding it behind his small pack on his locker. Just as he finished wiping the inside clean, his Platoon Sergeant began to scream for its whereabouts.

The drill period that morning had not been going well for Sergeant Allander. This was the last chance he would have to practice the men on the Company Muster Parade drills, before they did it for real the next morning. The men were finding it difficult on the open order movement, and Allander was beginning to lose his temper, shouting unnecessarily and swearing at individuals. Halfway through the lesson, he fell the platoon out for a short break, mainly so he could cool down.

"Can we smoke Sergeant?" Asked one of the recruits, as they all gathered onto the grass verge beside the square.

"Smoke! Smoke!" Shot back the Sergeant, "For all I care you can burst into bloody flames."

"Sam, I know who the twister is," declared Billy, offering his cigarette end to light Kyle's.

"Twister, twister, what twister?" Asked Sam between puffs.

"The bloke who's been whipping the shit into my dustbin every morning."

"Yeah," said Sam looking interested.

"Yeah, it's Kettler. I watched him this morning doing it. If I hadn't been fast I would have been dropped in it again. What do you think I should do?"

Kyle's eyes narrowed. "Here, hold this," he said, pushing his cigarette towards Kennedy. With a quick two-handed movement to ensure his beret was straight, he marched off towards Corporal Thomson, who stood on his own further down the square. As soon as he halted rigidly to attention in front of the Corporal, Thomson asked him what it was he wanted.

"I'm after some advice Corporal, it's about Kennedy's dustbin. Each morning someone has been putting something into it just before inspection. Well, now we know who it is but we don't know what to

do about it."

"I'd break both his arms," said Thomson with a half-smile. "Who is it?"

"That's just it Corporal, you see it's Corporal Kettler. Some of us seen him do it this morning," lied Kyle.

Thomson's smile disappeared. "OK Kyle, leave it with me."

Thomson caught up with Kettler during NAAFI break in the Smith-Dorrien Club, after a few minutes discussing the minor faults of the platoon, Thomson decided to get the problem sorted. "When yah going to stop buggering about with that dustbin, Jerry?"

Kettler froze with his tea cup against his lips, "What da yah mean?"

"Oh come on, I mean the dustbin you keep doctoring every morning and dropping Kennedy and Daniels on 'show clean' for."

"Who told you this?" demanded Kettler, lowering his cup onto the table.

"No one told me anything. I seen you doing it the other morning," replied Thomson, lying with an even straighter face than Kyle.

"It's gone on far too long. If you don't stop, I'll see Allander and let him sort it."

To Kettler that was the ultimate warning, he agreed to stop messing with the dustbin.

The last period that afternoon was a run, under the guidance of the PT Sergeant Major and his ginger-headed Corporal. The dress for the platoon was PT vest, denims, puttees and rubber-soled boots. The run began from outside the billet, with the Sergeant Major giving the Platoon two quick commands, "Right turn, by the left, double march," over Queens Avenue across to the Farnborough Road, then a right turn up the Baualy Road. At the beginning, the pace was steady with everyone in step, some even chatting and laughing. Before the end of the first mile all this had changed. The banter and gaiety had gone; its place had been taken by coughing and heavy gasping. Soon individuals began to drop back, unable to keep up with the pace. Sergeant Allander and Corporal Thomson, who also accompanied the platoon, now found it necessary to drop back with these people.

At first they encouraged, then threatened and in some cases dragged them forward. The runners turned up a narrow side road, then off onto a dirt track. This track led them into a small sandy basin, which they crossed onto another track, so rich in sand the men sank up to their ankles. Further along, the track branched upwards on

rising ground towards a steep ridge, where the recruits faced a thirty metre climb almost straight up. The PT instructors ran up the incline, others attempted to, but were forced to stop and walk, only ten members of the platoon arrived on the ridge within three minutes of the instructors reaching the top. There they were told to form into their three ranks, put their hands on hips and breathe deeply.

They waited for five minutes while the stragglers clawed their way up the slope, fighting to overcome the pull of gravity. With faces showing tortured determination, they staggered to the top, hearts pounding on chest walls. Without waiting for everyone, the Sergeant Major led the platoon off again, running along the top of the ridge. Reg Berrill had just cleared the crest as they began, with a pained expression, and a low moan of self-pity he stumbled after them. This was the platoon's first introduction to Heart-Break Hill.

Some people would never see the top of the ridge that day. Sailor Harris was one; he was half a mile back collapsed on his hands and knees, vomiting his dinner into the sand. Corporal Thomson stood over him, explaining in some detail his shortcoming, his lack of manly endeavour and the fact that he was an out and out pansy.

Once off the ridge, their course looped the runners back again to the sandy basin, where again they stopped for all the stragglers to be herded in. After a head count had been made and Sergeant Allander accounted for his thirty-nine chicks, he gave a nod to the PT Sergeant Major. With that, they set off on the final leg back to the billet. They arrived outside with a main body of about fifteen who came in as a platoon, the rest stretched back to the Farnborough Road, where Sergeant Allander and Corporal Thomson were pushing and pulling the tail-enders. It was no encouragement to most to be told prior to dismissal by the Sergeant Major that that run was the shortest and easiest the platoon would ever do!

At 0810 hours, Saturday morning, 770 Platoon marched on the barrack square to take up their allotted position for the morning Muster Parade in the rear of the Company. Once all platoons had formed up, Sergeant Allander positioned himself a few paces in front of the platoon. Corporal Thomson stationed himself beside the right hand man in the front rank, he was to be the platoon's right marker. From the direction of the Company office, Company Sergeant Major Broadhouse marched onto the square, head erect, his pace-stick held in his left hand parallel with the ground swinging backward and forward with his arms. Just before halting he placed the stick under his armpit. A quick command from him was answered by all the platoon Sergeants and Corporals coming to attention, then marching

off in quick-time to all halt in a single rank, shoulder to shoulder in front of the Company Sergeant Major — Sergeants on the right, Corporals on the left. After a thorough inspection of the non-Commissioned Officers by him, they were dismissed to return to their platoons.

Then on giving the command 'right', all the right markers braced up. On the word 'marker', they came to attention, then marched forward fifteen paces, halted and stood at ease. Broadhouse took a deep breath.

"Company," the whole parade braced up, "Get, on parade." Everyone, including the right markers, came to attention, with the Company now marching forward fifteen paces to join them. The Wicklow Irishman who was in the front rank forgot to count the paces, resulting in him taking a further two steps. Allander seeing this out of the corner of his eye, ordered him to stand still.

The next command from the Company Sergeant Major was, "Company open order." With this each front rank marched forward three paces, while the rear rank went back three.

"Company dressing, right dress," was the next command. Everyone took a short sharp step forward at the same time turning their heads to the right, and raising each right arm to bring it level with the next man's shoulder. Only the three right hand men kept their eyes to the front, as the rest of the platoon began shuffling to gain their correct dressing. At the same time the Corporals marched five paces to the flank, turned about and began to give corrections to each man, bringing one forward, directing another back. After completing all three ranks, the Corporals took up a position five paces from, and facing into the front rank.

On a signal from the Company Sergeant Major each Corporal in turn ordered his platoon, 'eyes front'. With that, all heads and eyes faced the front, right arms dropping sharply to sides. When the Corporal of the front platoon gave his command, that was the signal for all the Corporals to march in, halt and turn to the right, resuming their original position of right marker.

On the order from the Company Sergeant Major, "Platoon Sergeants answer for your platoons," each Sergeant in turn stated in a loud voice that 'X' number of men from his platoon were not there, and gave the reason why; finishing with the number he had at his back at that moment. The Company Sergeant Major now turned about to face the Company Commander, a tall sandy-haired Major, who had been waiting patiently for several minutes. Broadhouse handed the

Company over to his Officer Commanding, then moved briskly around him in a half-circle to stand on his left.

The OC, in one breath, stood the Company at ease then called it to attention again, “Fall in the Officers,” he commanded loudly. With that each Sergeant turned to his right, marched around to take up a new position in the rear of the platoon. At the same time, the platoon Officers who had been waiting at the edge of the square, marched across to halt in the position the Sergeants had just vacated.

The last order from the Officer Commanding was one allowing the Platoon Commanders to begin inspecting his platoon. This was normally prefixed by a warning, to one of the platoons that he would be inspecting them himself that morning, “768 Platoon stand fast, the remainder carry on.”

All this was much simpler than it sounded, but for the new recruits, who were all suffering from acute stage-fright, it was a difficult experience, causing many to live in dread of making a fool of themselves by cocking the movements up.

A new addition joined the platoon over the weekend: a tall, loose-limbed lad from Bolton. He had been in 768 Platoon originally, but having twisted his knee in the second week’s training on a run, found himself after recovering being back-squaded to 770, where he was expected to start again where he left off.

Monday morning arrived far too quickly for some, finding several bulling and brushing items of their kit which should have been done over the weekend. The room jobs had changed, meaning a different letter was now resting beside each name. Reg Berrill turned grey when he spotted the ‘F’ beside his. Not knowing that Kettler had been given the gipsy’s warning, he grabbed the dustbin, keeping it in his bed space the whole week, only returning it to the hall as Allander placed his boot on the top step. The second week went by much the same as the first: rifle lessons, drill, map reading, gym and runs. They also had inoculations and jabs, the effects of which put several into their beds for an afternoon.

The end of the week gave the platoon its first casualties. Every Friday the platoon Staff would have a conference to discuss the standard of each recruit. If they thought a soldier was not trying, or he was not shaping up to the requirement, a recommendation would be put forward to the Company Commander.

Two men from the bottom room would be leaving; one discharged because he was found to have varicose veins, the other because he requested to go to another regiment. From the top room another left

— a Welsh boy whose father had just died in a mine accident, leaving his sick mother with no one to look after her. He was being discharged on compassionate grounds. The middle room lost Sailor Harris, back-squaded to join 771 Platoon in their first week's training. The platoon would miss him and his crusty humour, but he had proven to be unfit, and was now being sent where he would be given more time to improve on this weakness. The thought of going back to the start to relive the last two weeks amused no one.

CHAPTER 4

I don't know what effect these men will have on the enemy,

But by god they terrify me.

Duke of Wellington

This third week found the platoon settling into a routine, with the men now responding to Reveille much more sharply than in the first. Everyone, once awake, would rush to wash and shave; even those who previously didn't, ensured all fuzz was clear of chin and cheeks. Both Roy Adams and Joe Wishart, the two Birmingham boys, had found themselves on 'show clean' the first week, because they had been naïve enough to think they weren't that old yet.

As Sergeant Allander entered the barrack rooms for his morning inspection, every recruit was stood by his bed, boot caps in line with the two end bed legs. On approaching each soldier they would come to attention, standing at ease only when he had moved to the next. If a comment was made the individual involved would remain at attention to give his reply or await possible punishment.

Allander froze in mid-stride as he passed Reg Berrill. Pointing with his cane he demanded, "What is that thing?"

"What thing Sergeant?" queried Reg in return, his heart doubling its beat.

"That! that!" replied the Sergeant, moving around Berrill to rest the tip of his cane inside his locker on a plain white pottery mug.

"That's my mug Sergeant," said Reg, still at attention but now twisted around from the waist, facing backwards towards his locker.

"No it's not," mocked Allander, "anything that dirty can only be a piss pot. You can't possibly put anything that heaving to your lips. Look, look, filth?"

Allander now had the mug dangling by the handle on the end of his cane, pushing it under the recruit's nose.

"Yes, Sergeant," replied Berrill transfixed, cross-eyed, staring at a thin black line on the mug where the handle joined the body.

"I'll tell you what Berrill, I won't 'show clean' you for this. Instead I'll give you a chance to prove your fitness and agility, how does that

sound?"

"What do I have to do Sergeant?" Asked Berrill in a weary tone, now looking out of the corners of his eyes at the Sergeant.

"Berrill I am going to count ten then throw this mug out the window. If you can get downstairs in time to catch it you may keep your mug. I'm counting now… one…" Allander took the mug off his cane to hold it in his right hand. "Two …" Reg was down the room and up the steps like a shot. "Three …" counted the Sergeant tossing the mug a few inches in the air. On eight, Berrill arrived below his open bedside window. Arms half outstretched awaiting his mug. A new one would cost 1s. 6d. — a sizeable amount to a grade four recruit.

"Nine …" shouted Allander. "Are you there Berrill?"

"Yes Sergeant," came the answer.

"Ten …" the mug sailed through the window on the opposite side of the room, to smash on the asphalt below. Berrill heard the ten, to be followed by a roar of laughter from the room, but no mug appeared through his window. However, it didn't need Sergeant Allander screaming at him from the window some seconds later, to get around the back of the barrack block with a dustpan and broom, for him to realise he would be forking out 1/6 for a new mug.

The rest of the week jerked past in mixed periods of pain and pleasure. Pain from the gym, the runs and the drill on the square. Pleasure from a five mile relaxed march with everyone carrying only a rifle and skeleton order equipment. And a morning on the rifle range, where the platoon learned the procedure for zeroing the sights of the rifle. Wednesday the platoon took part in the fortnightly foot race, this time 771 were the new boys. For 770 the challenge was no longer that great, they were used to running in boots and denims, so this proven course in plimsoll and PT shorts was looked upon as a breather. Sailor Harris was there also, but this time wearing the other team's colours. He would remain with 771 for three more weeks, before decisions would be made on his behalf, sending him to another branch of the Army. The reason printed on his personal documents would read, 'incapable of reaching the physical standard required for Airborne Forces'.

One of the platoon from the bottom room, had the distinction of being the first of 770 to run foul of Sergeant Fraser. In a mind blanked moment, whilst walking about the barracks he had placed his hands in his pockets. Within seconds Sergeant Fraser's prehistoric face was screaming up at him, demanding to know who had given him

permission to wear Glasgow gloves, and that should he catch him doing it again, he would become a guest in his hotel where horrible things would happen to him.

This week also found the recruits being introduced to the Bren gun or its official designation of light machine gun (LMG). This, they were told, was the modern adaptation of the Second World War .303 calibre section machine gun, now remodelled to fire 7.62 millimetre ammunition.

The instructors told them this weapon had proved itself all over the world in every climate, and that it was a terrific weapon, ideal for its job. To most of the young soldiers it didn't look like much, a wooden shoulder butt, slim body, with two metal forked legs that folded up under the barrel, even the magazine holding the rounds that sat above the working parts of the body gave it an upside down look. Dave Urwin eyed the gun with respect, for his uncle had always spoken of the Bren in tones of admiration. Unknowing he was soon to become involved in a long standing love affair with this weapon, one of the British Army's true and trusted servants.

Ash ranges was a large, small arms' range complex, just outside Aldershot that had provided shooting facilities for the Army for many decades. As well as the Aldershot Garrison, other units would journey in to live under canvas for several weeks, to fire on these ranges.

Today a battalion of non-Airborne soldiers, 'crap hats', as the brigade called everyone who didn't wear a maroon one, had just arrived and were in the process of settling in to their tents. As they did so, the Commanding Officer was holding a coordinating conference with his Company Commanders in his own Headquarters tent. The Colonel, a veteran of Burma in the last war where he, as a Captain had commanded a Company, had personally written the training programme for this two weeks, and was now about to finalize each Company's activities for that period. Unknown to him the six Majors sitting to his front were in an unhappy mood. Nowhere within the two week training programme was there an allowance for an evening off for the men.

When the Colonel completed his general brief, outlining the Battalion's main objectives, and reasons, for the training that was about to begin, he paused to ask if there were any questions before discussing the individual Company range allocations. This was the cue the Headquarter's Company Commander had been waiting for, as the senior Major he was to present the case for all.

"Yes Sir," he began, uncrossing his legs. "I notice the programme

doesn't allow for an evening off for the men." The Colonel fixed him with a firm stare through the glasses that sat slightly down on his nose.

"We are not here for a holiday Julian, and we do have a beer tent," he pointed out.

"Yes Sir, but the hours the men will be working will be long and hard. A night out would be something of an incentive for them.' The Colonel again fixed his Major with a thoughtful stare, then shifting his gaze to each of the others he asked, "Are the rest of you in the same like of mind?"

A series of 'Yes Sir', accompanied by the nodding of heads was their quick response. His stare remained for some seconds before the eyes shifted downwards to consult the programme.

"Alright gentlemen we will forego the SMG and pistol shooting of Monday evening, will this day suit everyone?" Again confirmation was given.

"Good," then turning to his Adjutant, "Peter arrange with the MTO for transport to be laid on," then speaking to all present, "I am laying down two stipulations, one, the men will walk out in uniform only, and two, all entertainment will be confined to the Aldershot NAAFI Club," and so the matter was closed.

With satisfaction the Company Commanders now transferred their thoughts to the training programme, they had won a minor victory on behalf of their men. For the Commanding Officer, although he was not aware of it, his two stipulations had won for him a number of uncomfortable moments, which almost jeopardized his career.

Monday night was a non-event in Aldershot, it being traditionally the brigade's evening of rest. The weekend normally draining the members of 16 Para Brigade both physically and financially, with the combination of a day's hard training, and the after-effects from the weekend, most settled for an early night in barracks. The real bitch of the week was Tuesday. This day arrived on the soldiers to find them with no money in their pockets and after having had a full night's sleep, with a stimulated thirst and sexual urges to satisfy.

The army girls within the Garrison or from Guildford, the Women's Royal Army Corps called WRACs and pronounced racks, were paid on the Wednesday so the lads could sponge off them that evening, which would see them through to the Thursday, when they themselves were paid. But Tuesday always presented the problem of where to get some ready cash for a night out. For most it was a case of borrow or go without, but for others, more resourceful or desperate, the brigade had

found a place of unlimited revenue, but only supplied to those who were prepared to go to the trouble of getting it.

Most Tuesday afternoons from within the many formations of the brigade, men would draw straws, pick cards or just take their turn, normally this would be from groups of five or six who pooled their loose change for the selected individual to purchase a one way ticket to London. Once there, the chosen representative would make his way to one of the homosexual frequented pubs on the fringe of the West End. There he would allow himself to be propositioned by one of the regulars, into nipping into the toilet to give a quick wank or whatever. Then collecting a fiver or so, he would hurry back to Aldershot. Thus financed, he and his mates could spend the rest of the evening swilling beer and wooing WRACs — a sound and proven system that almost always worked. It may appear a cold-blooded and degrading act, but it was one that provided cash for men who had taken the decision to acquire it, in the quickest and to them the simplest way. Besides most of these savages wouldn't recognize a scruple if it kicked them in the balls.

Our platoon's fourth Monday found it much the same as the third. No one had been back-squaded or sent to another unit, or asked for discharge by purchase, which could be done for the sum of £20. No back-squaders had been posted in either, so the letters designating room jobs had an even turn around. Which pleased Corporal Kettler whose job it was to make the alterations; however, he still went to the trouble of changing a few names around, so as to place an 'F' alongside Billy Kennedy's name.

That evening as 16 Para Brigade settled down to a quiet night, three ton Bedford trucks began arriving outside the NAAFI Club; the first lift in from Ash ranges deposited almost two hundred men in the bar, with another three or four hundred to come. By seven o'clock the club was bursting at the seams. There was a second bar upstairs, that could have been used to take the overflow of impatient thirsty men, but it was never opened on a Monday.

The two barmen now aided by the manager, still could not cope with the mammoth task they were faced with. Some had been in the building for over an hour, and had not had a glass to their lips, others first in, now sat or stood with empty mugs, knowing the chance of a refill would be long coming. The front of the bar was solid khaki, ten or twelve deep; as a soldier received his drinks his next problem was finding a seat. All the chairs had long gone, with standing room at a premium, the hall and up the staircase was full, which caused a hundred or so to spill out into the grass area between the building and

the sidewalk.

This combination of no beer and lack of space was destined to fuse trouble, and it did very quickly. It was the chair that started it all.

Being a Monday the brigade was poorly represented that evening, about thirty or so sat in one corner by the side entrance that opened out onto Gun Hill. Having seen the build up of battle dress and forest green berets they prudently moved themselves to the advantage of two solid walls and a possible line of retreat.

At 1917 hours Fred Bains from 63 Company stood up to go to the toilet.

At 1918 hours one of the battle-dressed gang who had just been served his drink picked up Fred's chair. Ginge Simmonds from Para Ordnance, pointed out to him that the chair was taken and the owner would be back shortly. The soldier in battle-dress presented the argument that as possession was nine-tenths of the law, Simmonds should leave the room committing intercourse upon himself as he did so. With this remark jock Coyle a 9 Squadron Sapper stood up and with the challenge of, "See you ya Geordie bastard," placed his fist on the chair holder's nose, moving it over to the man's right cheek. Chair, pint and man moved rearwards in a horizontal back flip for some feet, before making contact with other khaki-dressed men. First blood to 16 Parachute Brigade. Who knows perhaps they had second and third as well, but it would have made little difference on the outcome.

A wall of angry men in battle-dress uniforms advanced in a frontal assault on the handful of civilian-dressed enemy. The fight was short, sharp and one-sided. Ground was defended savagely, holding back the brown flood until a route could be cleared to the side door.

Casualties were inevitable, going under to be punched and kicked unconscious, then trampled into the floor. The handful of loyal WRACs were the first to be channelled out the door; however, one remained beside her boyfriend with a shoe in her hand swinging at every green beret that came in range. The end, or as what turned out to be the end of the beginning, was climaxed in a rush, the last of the rear guard propelled out the door like toothpaste from a tube.

Even then there was no reprieve, for now they were also being attacked on the flank by those who had originally sought space to drink outside the building. Which left no choice now, but to escape by running across the road into the Waterloo Park married quarters, still doggedly fighting until the chase was given up. For the victors there was to be no calming of the situation, their blood was up, and now they were about to gorge themselves on spoils taken from what most

of them considered the true villain of this evening.

Standard practice for the bar staff on the outbreak of a fight is for the shutters to be pulled down, until the situation cooled, but as the manager reached up to lower the metal grilling, a dozen pairs of angry hands shot forward to stop him. At this point words were exchanged, but not for long, within half a minute manager and staff were dragged from behind the bar to be manhandled through the crowd, to find themselves standing outside the building; they were lucky. Battered and unconscious bodies of the brigade members, who were overpowered in the fight, were kicked through doors and windows, to lie outside, bruised, bleeding and unattended. Now beer and spirits began to flow more rapidly, thanks to six or seven self-appointed barmen unhindered by the 'in-bugger-ance' of having to collect money.

From within the scarred body of brigade individuals that found themselves standing on the grass verge of Waterloo Park, leaders began to emerge, this action was not to be left unavenged. Territorial rights had been infringed, sacred tribal ground desecrated, pride injured, the gauntlet had been cast at the feet of 16 Parachute Brigade and now a forest of hands were to reach to pick it up.

But first the hue and cry had to be sounded, for reinforcements to be gathered. Runners were sent back to the Brigade barracks, into the town to fetch men from the several pubs that each unit tended to adopt as their own; others were dispatched in the direction of the Aldershot football ground to collect the Brigade's Parachute Medics from their barracks and the Crimea pub across the road. Having set counter-moves in motion, those left crossed over the roundabout to observe the enemy and wait.

Men would be coming and in their hundreds, but for the brigade a more advantageous date in regards to numbers could have been chosen. Of the battalions, only two were in station, the 1st and 3rd; however, the 3rd had just returned that afternoon from a week's exercise on Salisbury Plain and were in a general state of tiredness. This left the 1st, who for several reasons were under strength, only fielding about three hundred men at a push. Still, the rest of the brigade had the numbers and the stomachs for what was about to commence.

The first to join our survivors were a dozen or so who had stepped outside the 'Rat Pit' to see what all the commotion was from across the street. Then gradually a steady flow of small groups began to swell the ranks. As the stories were passed from mouth to mouth, of the unjustified attack on the sainted members of the brigade, tempers

became inflamed. Within the hour, the troops began to spill around the web of streets fronting the NAAFI Club, first across to the library then circling until only one road separated the two bitter teams.

This pending confrontation had not gone unnoticed by those responsible for order. The civilian Police had been early on the scene, but kept a discreet distance. Even the NAAFI manager and his statement of bodily assault brought no physical reaction from them. This was not due to apathy on their part, far from it, the Aldershot Police were of Hampshire's finest, but as long as no civilian element was involved they were not obliged to present themselves in force. This was the job of the Army authorities and their Military Police, which had already been informed. Both the Garrison Military Police, and the Brigade MPs had been observing the incident for some time but recognizing the situation for what it was, were making no moves, only watching for any flare ups, hoping everything would cool down.

Up in the brigade areas word was quickly passed to BOSs to stop anyone leaving the barracks, but there was little they could do. As the build up of friendly forces continued, the occupants of the club withdrew inside in order to have a more definite defence, and to be closer to the bar.

The trickle of men down Gun Hill had been steadily building, bringing the brigade personnel onto the scene, in whatever dress they had been found in; most were in civilian clothes, others in uniforms. Those in battle-dress were from the barrack guards and had somehow escaped the guard room. A number of the third battalion appeared marching down Gun Hill bare footed in pyjamas.

The first assault began as Jack Coyle's unconscious body was being recovered, to be carried across to the grass in Waterloo Park. Just as the medic was diagnosing concussion twenty or so of his mates from 9 Squadron arrived. A quick observation of Coyle was all they needed; as one they rushed the Gun Hill side door, causing the blue touch paper to be lit.

The traffic on the roundabout was halted dead as a wave of angry men leapt guard rails and trampled flower beds in the charge to get to the NAAFI building. Those within were caught off guard, as there had been no build up in verbal exchange or closing of distance; doors were unblocked and windows not barred, through which the brigade now came.

Contact erupted, brutal and bloody; having had an hour of uninterrupted free boozing, the khaki soldiers had mellowed, even beginning a singsong, but now faced again with a violent situation

that had to be met with equal violence they squared up to it.

This was a North Eastern Regiment, one of Britain's most famed. Their early battle honours had been won with muskets under Marlborough, Wolfe and Wellington. It was also a family regiment, with grandfathers and fathers having fought in the two recent Great Wars, where in the first, entire streets had been decimated of their men folk through battles such as the Somme and Passchendaele. These men, at the moment battling shoulder to shoulder, whether national service or regular, were recruited mainly from mining communities, and those who have bathed coal dust from their bodies are not normally wanting in courage.

As resistance stiffened against the initial onslaught, the attack began to falter. First around the windows where the Paras found themselves short of numbers. Reinforcements were prepared to help but couldn't gain entrance, because of others being forced back out. Finally this section was abandoned for the present, with both sides collecting their wounded either side of the brick work.

The 9 Squadron rush on the Gun Hill door allowed a brief sally into the bar, but again numbers told. Only a handful of men could push through the restricted gap of the doorway, where once in, a wall of brown awaited them. As one khaki figure was dropped, another just as fresh replaced him. Sheer weight of bodies forced that forlorn hope back out onto the Gun Hill Road.

The main entrance was another matter, space there dictated a more even man to man match. Having entered the hallway the brigade sealed the bar room door with fist and boots, while behind them close quarter combat was bruising skin, breaking bones and spilling blood, on the staircase and down the toilet hall. No quarter given — none asked.

At the tented camp on Ash Ranges the first to receive a warning that the troops were being unruly was the duty officer. A phone call from the Garrison MPs told him his battalion was acting naughty at the NAAFI Club. This officer knowing the men and their ways decided to dispatch the BOS in the duty wagon to investigate; as it happened the Regimental Sergeant Major got wind that something was happening in the town at the same time and accompanied the BOS on his journey.

They arrived on the scene just as the brigade launched its attack. Slapping the driver on the arm the RSM ordered him to turn about and drive like hell for Ash Ranges. A man of much experience he knew what had to be done. Having briefed the BOS as to what he

wanted, on returning to the camp, he hurried to the Commanding Officer's tent to put him in the picture and to ask permission to carry out his plan to quell the situation.

Meanwhile back at the fight there had been little change, the brown mob held the bar and toilets, while the Paras now occupied the hall with a barrier of chairs and tables sealing the bar door. This lull remained for half an hour or so, while each side licked its wounds. The Para medics came into their own hew, fulfilling two roles — first causing casualties to the other side with their fists, then treating the injured of both teams with tender, experienced hands.

The next bloody phase began with the arrival of fresh troops in the form of almost a hundred men from 33rd Artillery. As they were billeted the furthest up Queens Avenue they received the call last, but responded magnificently. Stealing transport from the MT yard they arrived at the club primed on exaggerated stories and thirsting for blood. The impetus of this new charge took the brigade again into the bar, this time through both door entrances. Twilight had passed, leaving our gladiators to fight in an arena of artificial electric light.

Combat was as before, savage and personal, man to man, until one went down, to be replaced by another bent on revenge. This was how Rod Baxter from 3 Para Machine Gun Platoon met his fate going after the man who had just floored his mate. As he reached for the villain, a blow to his ear pole-axed him down, where the side of his head struck a table corner, this ruptured the skin only slightly but the real damage was done to the skull and brain below it. Rod Baxter died on the NAAFI Club floor, killed in action.

At this point events began to happen that were about to end the evening's frolic. First the RSM of this rogue battalion returned from Ash Ranges. With him he had thirty or so members of the Sergeants' Mess, all in uniform, crammed into a number of Land Rovers. Behind them a fleet of lorries followed, driven by anyone captured in camp who could drive a truck.

At about the same time the Officer Commanding the Brigade Military Police arrived, via a phone call to his home by the Brigade Duty Officer. On arrival he took immediate command of all MPs, whether Airborne or not. As soon as the RSM's vehicle stopped just short of the, roundabout, he was out and striding in a quick but measured pace through the ring of angry paratroopers towards the club, a brave man being followed by a posse of not quite as brave, but loyal mess members.

Inside the club a lull had again occurred, a combination of both

sides fighting themselves to a standstill and a general clearing of the killing ground of all casualties.

As the RSM entered the hallway he was met by a sight he had not seen since his war days in Italy. Men dressed in either battle dress or civilian clothes lay propped against walls, bleeding and bruised. Knowing he was now in the tiger's mouth he had to keep the momentum going. Hoping to gain the initiative by surprise, he forced his way through the human barrier in the bar doorway without actually laying hands on anyone. Once through he found himself standing amongst the bomb craters of no man's land.

Facing the mob that was his battalion he raised his voice to ensure everyone, whether drunk or sober, knew exactly who was addressing them. He began in his most formal parade ground bark, "Just what the hell do you men think you're doing?" Then, with a finger as deadly as a pistol, he began pointing at individuals. "You, why are you almost naked?" The question was asked of a soldier standing in a uniform whose blouse was practically ripped from his body, similar questions were asked of others in rapid succession.

In this way the RSM kept his thinly held-initiative. However it was almost wrenched from his grasp by the inevitable, a drunken voice boomed from the back of the crowd, "Piss off you stupid bastard." In the split second that followed, the RSM knew his reaction to that remark had to be a decisive and positive one or his presence in that room would prove useless. However his response was not needed. Instantly at his side a Sergeant appeared out of the small cluster of SNCOs that had followed him into the room.

"You can try to fuck the Regimental Sergeant Major off Pike, but I know you and tomorrow you will be on a charge. Now get yourself outside before it goes even harder against you."

Unbeknown to those on the inside of the building, concurrent activity had been taking place that was about to give the forces of law and order the upper hand. For the last hour the civilian Police had cordoned off every street leading in to the roundabout, allowing neither vehicle nor foot traffic through. The Military roads leading from the camps were also blocked by MPs.

As the RSM led his party into the club, the OC of the brigade MPs began his own action. Directing his men to get between the two factions contesting the Gun Hill door, he then personally took a party into the main entrance, to find himself joining forces with the RSM's contemptibles. Their arrival was timely, for Rod Baxter's death had just been discovered.

After being extracted from the bar he had laid amongst others waiting attention from the medics. As the news circulated, several of 3 Para tried to rush the doorway screaming revenge, but they were seconds too late. The entrance to the bar was now filled with MPs, the ring leader being grabbed by a sixteen stone Staff Sergeant and threatened with instant jail unless he and his mates cooled down.

Inside the bar the good guys were winning, individual names were being called by the RSM's party, this having the right effect. The bad guys now knew there was no joy to be had here anymore. They were being singled out by people who were capable of having severe punishment inflicted upon them. A quick battle plan was formulated by the MP Major and the RSM.

The Military Police now forced a passage through the crowd of Airborne soldiers from the bar to the roundabout, there SNCOs directed the lorries to a pick-up point, while others shepherded their scared formations out the door onto trucks. Once the realization had sunk in that the night's fun was over and they were being made to go by authority not by force, their exit was taken proudly.

Out they came heads held high, carrying their wounded with them. Some with booty, bottles, fags and money hidden under tunics and in pockets. As they arrived at the line of vehicles more SNCOs catapulted them onboard, into the backs, ignoring the personnel capacity safety rules, forty or fifty soldiers were compressed into them, then the drivers frantically waved on. As each vehicle left verbal threats and much finger gesturing was exchanged between those watching and those leaving. The last few truck loads marched from the club singing the 'Bladen Races', as their final defiant act before being dispatched to Ash Ranges.

The excrement was still hitting the fan over this incident weeks after the event. But the brigade junior ranks weren't concerned about all the paper reprimands and slapping of wrists, that just washed over them. They smarted for a long time over the fact that a fight was brought to their door, and from it they could only extract a weak draw.

The following Friday, Rod Baxter was buried by his battalion in the Military Cemetery just off Ordnance Road, a fitting place to rest.

CHAPTER 5

There is sorrow enough in the natural way
From men and women to fill our day;
But when we are certain of sorrow in store,
Why do we always arrange for more?

Rudyard Kipling

The brawl of the previous evening went practically unnoticed amongst 770 Platoon, for everyone had stayed in barracks preparing for the next day's programme. The only hint that something had been going on down the town, was suggested by Corporal Kettler, who was seen to leave his bunk in civilian dress at 1930 hours, then return again an hour later.

Corporal Thomson however accompanied Sergeant Allander on his morning inspection of the rooms, his right hand lightly bandaged to protect some badly skinned knuckles. As exciting as the news of the battle was it did not generate a lot of concern from our platoon, for this fourth week was one that held a possible reward. Should they perform well on the square, answering a number of questions on Regimental History and in naming key persons within the depot and brigade, they could be allowed the coming weekend at home.

Wednesday morning was set aside for this test. The drill went well, for Sergeant Allander knew his job, demonstrating, teaching then finally extracting the correct movements of the drill from each man, not once accepting sloppiness or second best. The second phase was something different. Although everyone had been memorising names, dates and events some were better at it than others. This was not an individual contest, the platoon was to gain its weekend either collectively or not at all.

Their judge was the Company Commander who had been impressed with the drill, but now began to ask questions of each man. The platoon had been formed into a hollow square with the Officer Commanding standing at the open end. As he asked a question, one of his arms would point towards the recruit whom he wished to answer.

"Who is the Commanding Officer of the depot?" Sinclair got it right.

"What date was the Parachute Regiment formed?" Andy Dawson

got it right.

And so it went, battles, names, events all asked and answered rightly or wrongly. Reg Berrill couldn't remember the name of the depot Regimental Sergeant Major and when Paddy Kieran, the County Wicklow boy, was asked who the OC of recruit Company was, the platoon held its breath, but for once Kieran sparked, telling the Officer Commanding his name.

Just before lunch Sergeant Allander gathered everyone in the bottom room to inform them they had passed the morning's tests. The afternoon was occupied collecting two man tents, sleeping bags and other stores, for they were to spend all Thursday and Friday morning, outdoors on a little introduction to living in the field.

On Thursday morning, the Platoon after first loading the stores on a lorry, boarded two others, and drove for thirty minutes through the Hampshire, Surrey countryside. At an arrival point the Platoon was split into two, Lieutenant Ramsay and Corporal Kettler taking one half, Sergeant Allander and Corporal Thomson the other. Each group picked up its portion of the stores, then marched off in single file to set up two separate camp areas. The day was spent by both parties being instructed in points of field craft and tactical formations when moving across country. Lunch and tea was brought to them in heavy square metal containers called hay boxes.

After the tents had been erected, night games were devised. These consisted of Sergeant Allander's group trying to penetrate a defensive ring, protected by Lieutenant Ramsay's party; this sounded fun, and had everyone active, and trying hard, both defensively and offensively. The incentive for the attackers was that they had been told a bottle of beer was to be found on a small hillock centred in Ramsay's position.

Sam Kyle read the plot right first time. He found a low limbed fir tree under which to wait out the early part of the night, until it was time to return to their tents. Kennedy sat with him, now and again suggesting they should make at least one sortie for the beer, just to show willingness. But each time Sam vetoed the idea, content to quietly smoke cigarettes shielded under his smock. When the rain began Billy no longer talked of stumbling around in the dark.

At midnight, the exercise was halted, whereupon both sides returned to their camps. Before they were allowed to climb into sleeping bags, a guard duty roster was read out, for each man was expected to do a period through the night. Most of the young soldiers found it exciting to be responsible for everyone's safety while they

slept, but after forty minutes in the cold rain their keenness soon vanished.

At noon, the Platoon assembled, waiting in a small wood beside a narrow metalled road for the three ton lorries, which would be arriving to transport them back to the depot.

Corporal Kettler wasn't speaking to anyone, he had spent the morning sulking over having to stay up all night, to ensure the recruits changed their guard duties at the correct time, this on Lieutenant Ramsay's order. Kettler fumed as he brewed himself a cup of tea, using a small metal frame cooker, some solid white hexamine cubes and an aluminium mug filled with water. He wasn't intending to share this tea with anyone, not after learning he had been the only one to lose a full night's sleep. As the water neared the boil, Lieutenant Ramsay called all Non-Commissioned Officers to him for a quick de-briefing.

Before going, Kettler extinguished the flame, then dropped two tea bags into the water to brew while he was away. As his back turned, a pine-cone arced its way through the air, to bounce beside the unattended tea. The third cone struck its target, spilling amber liquid onto the grass. Kettler went spare on his return, demanding of the nearest recruits, who had done the dirty deed. But he was being ignored, for the trucks were arriving. Billy Kennedy couldn't look at Kettler, his broad satisfied grin would have been too tell-tale, a give away.

Those of the platoon who lived near enough, were able to enjoy their weekend at home, but of the others with the distance too great, alternative arrangements had to be made. Billy Kennedy offered to take Sinclair and Urwin home with him, to sleep the two nights in his parents' front room.

Sam Kyle knew where he would be staying. Just outside the main entrance to Waterloo Station was a building, which provided meals and accommodation for servicemen and women; the Union Jack Club, or UJ Club as it was called by most who knew it, was not the Savoy, but it did give the servicemen staying in London a bed to sleep in between journeys into whichever part of the city they wished to go to seek their pleasure.

Most of the platoon crowded into three compartments on the train up to London, for only a handful didn't have to use London as a dispersal point, like Reg Berrill who caught the train from North Camp Station to Reading then on to Swindon. The carriage vibrated with loud, boisterous, very happy voices.

These youths were pleased with what they had done over the last month. For them it had been four of the hardest, but most satisfying weeks of their lives, and were looking forward to boring their families with all the exaggerated details. At Waterloo they separated, waving their goodbyes.

Sam Kyle walked across the street to book a bed in the UJ Club. Just inside the front door he joined a queue at the desk.

The lobby area was crowded, for this was the beginning of the weekend, a time when squaddies, matlows and members of the RAF flocked into London, from the many camps and stations scattered about South East England, intent on enjoying a couple of days up the smoke. A large number of the servicemen dressed for the occasion in uniform, some because it was the only walking-out dress they had, and others for the simple reason they liked wearing their uniform. Of the army contingent that used the facilities of the UJ Club, on a good week a representative of every Regiment and Corps of the army could pass through its doors.

On the shoulders of the battle-dress uniform was a cloth, or brass badge designating the corps or Regiment the soldier belonged to. Of Corps there were many, but these were far outnumbered by the Infantry, sporting names that echoed past battles of the empire. Black Watch, Gloucesters, Welsh Guards, Gordon Highlanders, Green Howards, Hampshires, all worn by men proud to carry the name on their shoulders.

There were other names too, these soon to be brushed into history by amalgamation and disbandment. Names that still remain carved in wood or chipped on stone around barracks, camps and rifle ranges, scattered throughout the World. Royal Fusiliers, Cameron Highlanders, Ulster Rifles, Seaforth Highlanders, Rifle Brigade, South Welsh Borderers and County Regiments who were to suffer the indignation of being brigaded — losing their identity for a number. Leicester, Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry, Royal Sussex, Northumberland Fusiliers, Middlesex Regiment, Durham Light Infantry, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and many more, all soon to be names of the past.

Sam woke next morning on a top bunk, in a room filled with bunks. He had downed several pints the night before, mainly to drug his sleep against the disturbances, that normally occurred from the other swearing, shouting, singing, fighting, drunken guests, that shared the dormitory. Although most in the room were on the move, keen to grip a London Saturday, Sam took his time smoking his first cigarette of the day in bed.

An hour later, he lit his second, as he finished his breakfast in the dining room that adjoined the lobby. At the same table an RAF Corporal was reading a weekly magazine, folded so an inside page was facing Kyle, from which a woman and a young girl smiled out at him advertising a new washing up liquid. Staring at the picture, a curiosity within him gradually changed to impulse, and finally action. Stubbing out his cigarette Sam left the Club, to begin a journey across the river towards the outskirts of North London.

Kyle's steps slowed, as he approached the house which was his destination, reflecting on the number of years it had been since he last walked this pavement. On opening the low iron gate, his senses were filled with the sweet smells of the flowers, from the small but neatly kept front garden. From inside the house, footsteps began to answer the call he gave on the door's metal knocker. It was opened by a young, fair-haired woman in her mid-twenties.

"Hello Beth," said Sam in a pleasant enough tone, but unsmiling.

Beth may not have heard him, as he spoke she was already on her way to the hall floor, in a dead faint. Sam stepping over his wife, made for the kitchen to put the kettle on.

Beth Kyle stood beside the kitchen stove stirring gravy in a saucepan, while Sam sat at the dining table behind her sipping his tea. She had put on weight since he last saw her, four and a half years earlier, but in no way did this give her an unattractive appearance, just the opposite. When he left she had been a girl, now she was a woman. Beth turned to check his cup.

"Would you like another?"

Kyle shook his head.

"Why did you come back Sam?" She asked, sitting down to pour herself a cup from the tea pot.

"I thought it was about time I seen my daughter," was the reply.

"I could have sent you photos, if you had put a return address on your envelopes."

Sam didn't respond to this obvious hint, intending to bring out the fact, that the letters he sent regularly every month contained only money.

"Yes, well there wasn't much point, I moved around a lot," was the only defence he was prepared to give.

"What do you tell Suzanne about me?" he asked, looking carefully into his wife's eyes.

“Both Mum and I, tell her you are busy on a long job. I think Mum is trying hard to believe that as well,” now returning his gaze.

“What about Bert, what does he say?”

“He doesn’t talk about you, and we don’t talk about you, when he and Suzanne are in the room.”

In response to his question about her father, his wife’s face now took on a firm expression.

“When’s your mother going to leave that bastard?” He abruptly asked.

His wife placed her cup back on its saucer, straightening her back.

“Just because you and my father don’t get on, that’s no reason why Mum should leave him.”

“And you?” Asked Sam, “Would you leave?”

“Where would I go Sam? Traipsing around the country after you, dragging little Suzanne behind me,” was Beth’s direct response.

Kyle reached for a cigarette.

“I’m back in the Army, still doing basic training, but soon I’ll be joining a regular battalion. I could apply for an army quarter?”

Beth didn’t answer letting her eyes rest on the window curtains while she thought. Kyle became impatient, perhaps he had said too much too soon. Suddenly his wife’s silence triggered words that exposed sensitive suspicions.

“What’s the matter, have you got a fella around here?”

Beth’s eyes locked onto his, showing him an anger he had never seen from her before. Any reply was stalled by the front door opening and a woman’s voice calling, “Elizabeth, we’re home.”

“Mummy, I’ve got the bread,” cried another voice, this time a child’s.

Beth rose, crossing to the hall doorway.

“My goodness,” came the woman’s voice again. “That Co-Op becomes more crowded every Saturday.”

“Mum, Sam’s home, bring Suzanne,” Beth called raising her voice so it carried down the hall passage.

“Oh, oh, quickly Suzanne, into the kitchen your father’s here.”

Sam stood up to greet his mother-in-law, a woman in her late forties, plain, but still with an admirable figure, that age was yet to

spoil. She beamed into the kitchen, steering before her a four-year-old girl wearing a flowered dress and white cardigan. The child's blonde hair hung down either side of an angelic, but puzzled face. In her arms she held a large loaf of paper-wrapped bread.

Sam greeted the woman first, placing his hands on her shoulders to kiss her cheek with a, "Hello Mum," then to the child, "Hello sweety." The kiss he bent to give his young daughter was meant to be a quick peck, but as he began to straighten, the child dropped the bread, wrapping her arms around his neck, clinging with all the power her four-year-old limbs could manage.

Sam stood for several seconds holding his daughter in his arms, her face pressed against his cheek, the voice in his ear repeating, "Daddy, Daddy," for her this was the fulfilment of many adult promises. Now she was no longer the odd one out, she too, just like all her friends on the street, now had a real father.

Dinner and the early afternoon was spent with Sam passing uncomfortable moments, side-stepping questions from his mother-in-law about his future. Instead he tried to cover himself with a constant stream of facts about the jobs he had drifted to and from throughout the country.

Later in the afternoon, Suzanne asked to be taken for a swing in the park. This was something unfamiliar for Sam, walking with a child's hand in his. In the park he played with his daughter, rolling about on the grass, then pushing her on the swings and the roundabouts. Beth sat on a bench and watched. At seven that evening Suzanne was carried to bed by her father, and told to have a nice sleep, while given assurance that he would again take her to the park tomorrow.

Later Sam walked Beth to the corner pub for a quiet drink. Their first orders were almost empty before the conversation as it inevitably had to, began to take on a serious note. Sam made the first move.

"What time does Bert get home?"

Beth took up the change of topic casually, "Not until about nine, you know how busy the store is on a Saturday."

"Yeh, it can keep you tied up for some time," replied Kyle lying.

His father-in-law owned a large furniture store in Hornsey that closed at five-thirty on a Saturday. He was only half an hour's drive from his front door, and the fact Beth's father was not home yet, was well-known to him. Sam after leaving the army had worked in this store, which was how he came to meet and marry Beth. Bert did try to discourage the marriage, not because he didn't approve of Sam, but

because Sam knew too many of his secrets.

Bert had achieved his rewards in life fairly early; money, a house, a wife, and family, with the furniture trade, provided a good income with very little effort on his part. In fact with a good manager like he had, time was there to be filled and Bert filled these gaps in the best possible way — with women. His wife either not knowing or not wishing to know, defended his nights away from home as necessary business. Beth knew better, being informed of her father's affairs when she was eighteen, by an old school friend who had somehow found out. Her shocked disbelief gradually turned to hatred, as she bit by bit discovered the truth herself.

This had also affected her love for Sam, for as an employee of her father's he was looked upon initially as his accomplice. They met one morning when Bert dropped him at the house to dig the back garden. Kyle, indignant about this, had intended to kill the job off in a day. He made it last for a week and kept coming back in the evenings. In the end he broke down Beth's shield against him to finally accept his offer of marriage.

Her mother was pleased for she liked Sam, but Bert put every obstacle in his way, no help was provided to find a flat, and even forced his manager to fire him from the store on some trumped-up excuse. Kyle left his wife six months later humiliated out of the house in a row with Bert, who scorched him with unfair remarks about his inability to support a young wife, and his reliance on his in-laws for food and shelter. Sam knowing he was being condemned by the biggest two-faced bastard in Enfield, but unwilling to reveal it in his wife's house, did the next best thing, he dropped Bert on his own living room carpet.

"You didn't answer my question this morning?" Asked Kyle turning the conversation away from his wife's father.

"Which one did you want me to answer?" Came Beth's reply, reminding Sam of the angered remark, he made just before his daughter and mother-in-law arrived back from shopping.

"Yeah, sorry," said Sam looking down at his glass then up again to continue. "How do you fancy a move to Aldershot? Then you're only two hours away from your mother."

"It's not that Sam, I couldn't leave her."

"She wouldn't exactly be alone," pointed out Sam, with a slight annoyed tone.

"You know she is, and I think if I and Suzanne weren't around she

would find it difficult living in that house with my father. He uses it more as a hotel than a home. Besides it's only a matter of time before she finds out about him."

Sam looked at his wife, who was now staring down at her own half-filled glass. "So you know what he's like?"

"I've known before we were married," Beth replied.

Sam watched his wife, his voice now showing sympathy. "He's still at it then."/p>

Beth nodded confirmation.

"They change from time to time, but he always has one somewhere. This latest lives in Camden Town. I found a letter in the car last month."

Beth looked up at her husband, to continue but instead stared over his shoulder. "I didn't think he would come here, he usually drinks at 'The Feathers'," Beth's remark was icy. Sam turned to see who his wife was commenting about. A man, fiftyish, with dark greying hair, was crossing the room towards them. It was Beth's father. The smiling, good-humoured man that approached their table, gave the impression of genial friendliness, but Kyle knew better.

"'Ello Sammy boy good to see you back, Margaret told me I'd find you two here," was his greeting accompanied by a hand.

"Hello Bert good to see you too," Sam replied taking the hand. 'If that's the game then I'll play it for now,' he thought.

"'Ere let me get them in, Beth will you have a re-fill love?" Beth placed her hand over the sherry glass, shaking her head.

"Then it's just you and me Sammy. What's that you're having, mild and bitter?"

"Yes, thanks very much Bert," replied Sam, handing him the glass.

Kyle watched the man move off to the bar, then became aware of his wife's hand resting on his.

"Sam promise me … ."

Sam stopped her in mid-sentence, "Don't worry love it won't come to that again."

For the next half an hour a conversation was carried on, but one that veered and curved about, neither asking questions that might result in an uncomfortable answer. Finally, as Beth excused herself to the ladies, Bert broke the truce. Leaning across to Kyle, he asked in a

lot less gentle tone than he had been using, “Just what is it you’ve come back for?”

“I thought it was about time I seen the kid,” replied Sam truthfully.

“I don’t think so squire, I think you’ve found the big bad world to be too hard for you, and now you’ve come crawling back.”

Sam could see Bert was baiting him, confirming the older man did not forgive and forget.

“Told you Bert, I’m back in the Army now, couldn’t come back here even if I wanted,” was Kyle’s reply, trying to remain calm.

“We only have your say on that and I think different. Look Kyle we were a happy family before you came along to fuck things up. Beth was as sweet as a peach before you married her. Then what happened, you pissed off, fat, happy and single, while my poor daughter gets left with a pregnancy to bear, then a kid to raise.”

Sam tried to remain cool, but the remarks bit, for they were true, although not for the reasons Bert gave.

“Look Bert, the only reason you don’t want me around is because you’re afraid I might blow the gaff on you, about your women,” retorted Kyle, now beginning to lose control to an inner hate, that was building by the second.

“So now we’re getting down to it,” declared the older man, sitting back to fix Kyle with a spiteful glare. “So this is the real reason you came back, to poison my family with lies about me.”

“What lies?” responded Sam. “We both know you’ve been dipping your stick all afternoon in that bint of yours over in Camden Town.”

Bert hunched forward, his eyes burning into Sam’s. As he spoke he began to bang his fist on the table. “Listen you fucking little bleeder.”

Sam held the man’s eyes as his right hand reached for Beth’s empty glass.

“If you think I’m going to sit still to be blackmailed by a worm like you,” continued Bert, punctuating his ravings with more banging of the table.

Sam still holding Bert’s eyes but judging the up and down movements of the fist, deftly placed the glass. Bert jumped to his feet, gripping a badly gashed left hand with glass splinters protruding from it’s bloody heel.

“Sam, no.” Sam heard his wife’s shout, as he stood side on to Bert with fists tightly clenched, but still down at his side. Not taking his

eyes off the silenced man facing him, he commanded his wife to stand back. The barman was quick on the scene, demanding the quarrel be taken outside. Beth's father without a word left the pub.

Sam reached for his wife's arm. "Come on, I'll take you home."

"No," she resisted. "I want another drink Sam." Beth intended to forestall a second meeting between Kyle and her father for as long as possible.

Back at the house, Beth opened the door, pausing in the hall to hang her coat. Sam passed on to enter the kitchen, as Beth followed to make the tea she stopped in the doorway. Sam had picked up his travelling bag and was about to say his goodbyes. His wife spoke first, "You promised to take Suzanne to the park."

All Sam could say was, "I know."

"Couldn't you go in the morning?" asked his wife as she studied his face for reaction.

"What, and come back in another five years to find you with two nippers," snapped Sam moving towards the door.

As he passed his wife she halted him with a hand on his arm. Then lifting her head she kissed his cheek. Sam circled his free arm around her waist, holding her body tight against his as he placed his lips gently to hers. At any other time a sexual chemistry would have taken control, but the events of the evening were far too fresh in Sam's mind. Moving his lips to Beth's ear he whispered just once, "Beth I love you." Then he left, down the hall and out the door, not trusting himself to look back.

As Sam crossed the road from Waterloo Station, he could, see a youth making his entrance into the UJ Club the hard way, on hands and knees. Kyle didn't pay too much attention until he began to climb the steps himself, then he bent to help the drunk to his feet.

"Come on Paddy, I've got you old son." Paddy Kieran raised his head, trying hard to point his eyeballs towards the sound of the voice.

"Oh Sam, Sam it's you is it," came Paddy's happy reply. "What a great time I had Sam, I met some boys from home, just lived up the road from me they did."

"That's fine Paddy, fine," said Sam attempting to shift Kieran's body weight up the steps, "You knew them then?"

"Ah well, no, no, met them in a bar, but they knew everyone I did."

“Oh yeah,” was Sam’s knowing comment.

“How much did you give them?”

“They were trying to get home you see Sam. Had to give them something.”

Paddy honestly believed he had committed a charitable act. Just how charitable Sam found out when they reached the desk. He paid for Kieran’s bunk and for his breakfast the next morning. Still Paddy had one consolation, he had unwittingly become the latest member of the Servicemen’s exclusive association of ‘Those Who Have Climbed The “Union Jack Club” Steps On Their Hands And Knees While Pissed Out Of Their Mind’. They would never rival the Masons, but they had a damn sight more members.

770 Platoon had surmounted the first hurdle of their training. The last four weeks had been Phase One. They were about to enter Phase Two. This would be the coming six weeks of basic training. Phase Three was the month they would have to spend at the Parachute School, during which time they would be in the hands of the RAF for instruction and training. Phase Four would be a month’s continuation training back at the depot, in which polish was put to the basic infantry skill that they were expected to know, before being posted to one of the battalions.

Unbeknown to our recruits, the attitude of training was about to change. Over the last month they had been mollycoddled, eased gently into the tough rigours of military life, but now the real work was about to begin, at the end of which only the deserving would finish. On beginning, week ten looked a long way off but it closed on our platoon quicker than some of them expected.

The gym still held no fascination for anyone, however — as muscles were forced to extend to their capacity, life on the wall bars, ropes, boxes, horses, mats and other play things became a lot easier. A favourite sport of the PT instructors was to have the recruits work with logs. Teams of men on each, bending, throwing, catching and running, and God how it hurt.

The weapon training the men enjoyed best. For the drills were relaxed, and this was soon followed by trips to Caesar’s range for firing practice. Another weapon they fired was the Stirling sub-machine gun the SMG. This was a light automatic weapon used to engage targets at short range. Constructed of all metal-parts with a folding butt and a long narrow curving magazine that stuck out to the side, which fed bullets of a short stubby 9 millimetre calibre.

There was no relaxing of the runs, at least two a week and each one

further and over ground more rough than the last. These runs broke several of the platoon. They would be back-squaded to see if time would improve their performance, but if not, it was a case of transferring or finding the money to buy out. 770 suffered so badly in the seventh week, that even with its own influx of back-squaders Sergeant Allander still had to empty the bottom room to fill the empty beds in the other two.

The battle-dress uniforms that had been tailored for them were put to good use. The platoon spent most of week eight supplying the camp guard. This involved guard mounting, which incorporated all the drills learned on the square, then spending the night walking around the perimeter of the depot in the early hours of the morning the novelty soon wore off, to be replaced with boredom. Some relieved this by adding their own set of bayonet holes to the trunks of the trees, on the top road behind the Pioneer Shop.

The marches which were relaxed during the first month now changed. Sometimes with helmets, sometimes without, the march itself would always be hard, but with a helmet trapping the escaping body heat from the top of the head, insanity was always close at hand. If a soldier could not escape from the constant throbbing pain that was his and his alone to bear, the only relief was to quit, falling to the side of the track. The secret was to blank the mind: and plod on staring transfixed at the moving ground a few inches to the front of the boot caps. The Army had a phrase for it, ‘head down, ass up’.

On Thursday of the sixth week, the platoon was given an introduction to the Airborne Forces’ assault course. Throughout the length and breadth of Britain on every camp and Army establishment, assault courses will be found. These will vary from ingenious to challenging. The Parachute one was neither, it was plain hard graft. No grass or fine gravel separated the obstacles, nor were the obstacles puzzles to cross, or climb, or scramble upon. The spaces were dirt trails, the obstacles basic leap over and get on, climb and leap off, clear the holes and get moving to the next as fast as you can.

770 didn’t realize it at the time but they were lucky, the summer sun had baked the course dry. During the winter months the mud and water-logged obstacles of the course, sucked at scrambling boots and hands, caking them in liquid black. The introduction was with every man being sent around once to whet his appetite, then the Platoon was doubled off on a five mile run towards Heart-Break Hill and beyond.

Most of the ninth week was spent on the training area around Long Valley, learning and perfecting the technique of the section attack.

This was the infantry's first modest step towards offensive warfare. The section was the smallest fighting formation, the next up was a platoon. Three sections made a platoon, each section commanded by a Corporal, within which was the capacity to initiate its own attack. Normally ten men were the establishment for each section, six rifle men under command of the Corporal, while a Lance Corporal the section second in command was in charge of the machine gun, this was two men with a Bren gun. The two halves were called rifle group and gun group.

When 770 first saw this section attack demonstrated it seemed simple enough. But after doing it five or six times on the trot, carrying full fighting gear, its simplicity faded. At the end of each re-organization phase, Corporal Thomson would walk around the men of his section as they lay puffing and blowing on the ground. Repeating over and over, "Remember, sweat saves blood, sweat saves blood."

At the beginning of the eighth week, a new course of P Company formed up. Standing among the hundred or so other potential candidates for a red beret was Bob MacIntyre and Ken Whyte. Bob MacIntyre, dark-haired and short in stature, had applied to join the Paras some months before, but this application had sat at the bottom of his Company Sergeant Major's in-tray. However action on it was finally taken but not because the Company Sergeant Major wished to.

Bob, being a national service man had little money to go out with. In the same billet as him was a big evil brute, who came back drunk every Thursday night to punch MacIntyre unconscious for no apparent reason. After a month of this, Bob having recovered consciousness from the latest set-to, grabbed a pick handle, turning the now sleeping brute into a bloody-pulped hospital emergency case. Bobby began his journey from Fort George to Aldershot the next morning.

Ken Whyte also found it difficult to be released from his parent regiment. He was a regular soldier and a good one, which was his prime fault in not being given the chance of P Company. His Commanding Officer did not wish to lose him, and had the Battalion PT Sergeant instructor set a number of tests to see if he was suitable to become a Parachute soldier. The instructor had his orders from the Commanding Officer and set about devising trials that would have reduced Guy the gorilla to a whimpering pup.

Whyte found himself marching unheard of distances while under mule pack weight, and doing exercises in the gym that should have produced multiple hernias. Ken, digging the effort and resolve from somewhere deep down within him, passed all tests. Finally in desperation the Sergeant set Whyte the task of swimming for a mile in

the open sea fully clothed with boots on. To begin Ken couldn't swim a stroke, but somehow at the end he was becoming quite good at it. The same day Whyte arrived in Aldershot, the PT instructor took up his new posting at Catterick camp, as a Corporal.

Week ten was the crunch week. This was exam time. Having spent the last nine preparing themselves, the platoon now had to prove that they were fit and determined enough to become Parachute soldiers.

Monday afternoon, 770 paraded at the trainaziam area for their confidence test. A number of apparatus had to be mastered by each recruit. These were all man-made, and all high off the ground. Each involved jumping, running or leaping to the command of 'go' from a PT instructor. Failure to go when told was instant removal out of the depot.

The most dramatic of these tests was the shuffle bars. Two narrow metal pipes perched on their own at the top of a twenty metre tower. To negotiate, consisted of shuffling the ten feet from one end to the other. With a foot on each pipe the recruits, having to stand erect, would move to the middle, shout out his number, rank and name, then stepping over two brackets, advance to the end without kneeling to assist himself with his hands.

Scouse Holgarth began like everyone else, heart pounding with doubts as to whether he would make it to the other end. He went on because failure could mean returning to Liverpool, and that for him presented a far worse fate. One young soldier, unable to find the courage to release his grip on the piping and stand up, had to be retrieved from his frozen perch and assisted to the ground. He was whisked away by Corporal Thomson, to disappear into the well-drilled system for disposing of failures.

The second half of the afternoon was the assault course. Not just once but three times the platoon would have to ring their way, sweating and gasping around this series of exercises. On the command 'go,' the whole platoon charged forward in mass, jumping a wide ditch and a two foot bar.

At a six foot wall everyone pushed and shoved to get the front men over, for no one could afford halts; they were racing the clock, seven minutes to complete the course if not they faced failure. Once over the wall it became a race. No obstacle was designed to allow a rest, everyone had to be taken on the run. As he cleared the wall Dave Urwin forced himself forward as fast as he could go. Over a couple of low hurdles, up the pipe steps to the fireman's pole, on to a ramp and a six foot jump, over more hurdles, up and along another device to

jump again and so it went.

All the time instructors and staff spurring the runners on. If he was going well, it would be comments to hearten and encourage, but should he slow or show slackness it would be threats and insults, anything to provoke a response, and response was needed, for several men found themselves collapsed on the ground from exhaustion, compounded by the heat and the helmet they had to wear. As the platoon finished, lining up in one straight line in order of arrival, some were barely able to stand, only doing so because of threats from the instructors, most having to lean on their mates to comply. Dave Urwin was pleased with himself he had finished first, Jim Sinclair stood at his shoulder, second. Both men unable to speak congratulated each other with nods and smiles between large gulps for air.

Tuesday afternoon our Platoon was taken to prove themselves on the steeplechase. This was a course just over a mile long but as the name implies it was one involving a lot of jumping. It was also timed, so the recruits knew once again that pass or failure depended on their efforts only. This day the weather had changed. Gone was the oppressive heat of the last three months, replacing it were hanging grey clouds, that had begun spilling rain overnight and were still doing so.

Dave Urwin set out at a sprint. His morale was high after winning the assault course, and wishing to maintain his standard, it lasted to the third hurdle. As he placed his now mud-caked boot on the metal pipe to give himself a firm push to clear the rain filled pool that lay beyond, his foot slipped causing him to belly flop into the dark water below. Only eight or ten inches deep but within it was the broken bough of a tree. This Urwin struck with his chest knocking wind and enthusiasm out of him, scraping several patches of skin off his ribs. The other injuries Urwin received were of his own making, he had been in the lead and was now to suffer for his eagerness. As he tried to heave himself out of the water the other runners arrived. They did not intentionally place their boots on his back, legs, head and hands, but nevertheless they did.

Wednesday evening after tea, the platoon entered Maida gym for the final time. The occasion was the milling. This was a boxing bout between two individuals, in which each was judged on his ability to absorb pain while controlling his aggressions. In short it was a slugging match, to see if you could take it as well as dish it out. The opposition was 771 Platoon, for it was found in the past that the best performances were given by people who were not known to each other.

The first act was to pair off the fighters. Which was done by sizing each platoon. Shortest on the left, tallest on the right, that way each man had someone roughly his own size and weight. The platoons were sized back to back, then told to turn around so opponents could meet each other. Sam Kyle turned to meet a fresh-faced well-built youth who smiled a greeting. So it went up and down the line, most with a stomach full of butterflies, but trying to put on a casual face. Poor Reg Berrill turned to find a stocky brick wall leering at him. This was 771's hard man, when the platoon staff left the billet in the evening it was he who took charge, mainly with his fist so it was said. Reg turned sick and showed it, the hard man leered even more.

The gym's now converted layout, was a raised boxing ring with a platform beside it, on which the Officials sat judging each match. In opposite corners, one red the other blue, one of the PT staff acted as a second, with the contestants sat on benches below the ring awaiting their turn. On entering, a red or blue sash would be tied to their waist. As well as the two Platoons and Officials the gym rapidly filled with the Depot Staff. This gentlemanly contest was always well-supported which was why it was held in the evening, so everyone could be off duty to watch it.

The first two recruits into the ring were the lightest. As the referee, a Staff Sergeant introduced each man, referring to the colour of the corner and then the man's rank and name, each had to come to attention. The depot Adjutant acting as time keeper would then ring the bell, to begin the one minute of non-stop punching. 770's first man was a dark-haired lad from the top room. Both were light which gave a fast-moving, rapid arm flailing contest, similar to two humming birds clashing in mid-air. At the end of the bout a chief judge, the recruit Company Commander held up in both hands a red and blue card; this denoted a draw. If he had held up just one card that would have been the winner.

Joe Wishart was the platoon's representative for the third fight, looking every bit of his seventeen years. He started well but soon found himself up against a stronger person, who rained sharp, stinging blows into his face. As the pain became unbearable and his arms weakened, he turned his head and body away. This was fatal as it implied cowardice. 770 Platoon who were expected to cheer each of their men on any way, now sprang to their feet shouting and encouraging, willing Wishart to turn around and face his man. The ref had to stop the fight twice to warn him to fight and not shy away. The second time he did fight, swinging very little but taking a lot. He lost, but in the end he lost with honour.

The platoon wasn't doing too well; of the first three fights, it had one draw and two losses. By the seventh fight they had still only won one. Then Billy Kennedy came in. Standing toe to toe, they battered each other punch for punch, until Billy's opponent lay at his feet, blood streaming from a broken nose. With each fight the gym practically bulged its walls with the shouting and hollering that bellowed from both spectators and waiting contestants. But after Billy's fight everyone stamped and cheered to see such an even match finished this way.

Reg Berrill was next, entering the ring with legs that wouldn't stop shaking. He was scared stiff and looked it, eyes as wide as dustbin lids, all movement stiff and jerky, even his come to attention was wooden. In contrast the other corner radiated confidence and contempt, arrogantly draping one arm over the top rope, eyeing Berrill with a half sneer.

Perhaps it had been Reg's plan all along and if so it certainly worked, for when the Adjutant struck the bell, what came out of his corner was far from chicken. With a high-pitched Commanchie scream, Berrill charged across the ring flashing past an open mouthed dumbfounded ref, dragging his right glove behind him like a lead pipe, he bore down on his enemy. Brick wall only took two steps then froze unable to comprehend the changed situation. At one moment he was watching a timid quivering Jekyll the next a screaming demented homicidal Hyde. Reg's glove caught brick wall square in the face, while uncontrollably plummeting past his man to end tangled in the corner ropes. Brick wall did a back flip cracking his head on the canvas covered floor boarding, to stay down out cold.

When Reg first began to scream, the whole gym was silenced in an instant and remained so, until brick wall fell, never to rise, then bedlam broke out. From every corner of the building, shouting, screaming and the banging of feet created a joyous din. 770 Platoon who had written Reg off, rose as one man hugging and back slapping while dancing up and down. 771 also rose, shouting just as loudly, applauding with hands above their heads. It had been a victory for both platoons, only brick wall lost. Asked later, all Berrill could say was I don't remember a thing — and he meant it!

Unfortunately as spectacular as his performance was it didn't prove anything, he still had to demonstrate himself over a minute of fisticuffs. Another partner was found for him to fight again, this time in a more sedate un-berserked manner. Brick wall was taken to the Cambridge Hospital for observation, but when discharged immediately transferred to another regiment. 771 Platoon won the

contest thirteen fights to twelve.

The very last obstacle of basic training to be surmounted by our platoon was the log race. Thursday afternoon a large gathering of parachutists and potential parachutists, formed up in the sandy bowl that the recruits had run across a number of times before. At a marked starting line, teams of eight men stood beside five metre telegraph poles. Around each pole were eight toggle ropes tied in pairs, so as to distribute the weight evenly over four points of carry. Each toggle rope had a loop, through which the recruit placed his hand in order to hold the log while he ran. As well as 770 Platoon, what remained of the P Company course was also involved. Seven teams were to race, three recruits and four P Company.

As the teams waited, Dave Urwin adjusted his helmet strap feeling for a twist in it at the back of his head. He didn't look too good nor feel too bright, as well as his chest which was still painful, he now had a puffed half-closed eye from the fighting of the day before. He was not the only one to carry scars though, glancing about, observing the other seven members of his log only Andy Dawson and Paddy Kieran were unmarked. Kyle and Berrill had cut lips, Sinclair and Kennedy bruised and marked faces, while Joe Wishart carried a blackened left eye.

The men that stood beside these logs were only ten weeks to the day older than when Urwin first met them, but the change was apparent. Those who entered with extra weight had sweated much of it away. The younger lads who had been youthful skin and bones, now sported muscle and meat where there had previously been spaces. From the older re-enlistments, like Andy Dawson to the youngsters like Joe Wishart, everyone was now a walking seal of approval for the last two and a half months.

Before the race was started, all teams were dressed back fifty metres to the rear of the logs, which were spaced along the start line. On the command 'go', from the recruit Company Commander every man sprinted to his log grabbing a toggle rope. Then as a team, doubled with it across the basin to begin the hardest mile and a half of their lives. Supervising each log was one of the PT instructors but also attaching themselves to observe and encourage was a number of the platoon staff. Running amongst the logs were others, these, key headquarters' personnel, the Commanding Officer, his Adjutant and the like. They were there for a reason, this was the high point of the recruit and P Company training, and wished to observe first-hand the quality of men being selected.

For the initial three hundred metres the teams were encouraged to

motor forward at a pelting pace. The reason to reach the track at the far side of the basin, for it funnelled to a width where only two teams could run side by side. Corporal Thomson having placed Urwin and Sinclair as the two front men to set a fast pace, ran along beside them giving directions and pointing out where the firmest footing was. Cutting sharply in front of a following log, they plunged into the darkened track just behind a P Company log which was in the lead. In the past, every time Corporal Thomson's platoon had run this race he had lost to a P Company team, carried by men who were bigger, older and fitter. This was the last platoon he would train before returning to his battalion and he dearly wanted to win this one.

Dawson and Kyle, the two end men, put there to steady the team again by Corporal Thomson, began like the rest to feel the ankle-deep sand sucking the power from their legs. There was a short reprieve as the PT Corporal gave the command to lower the log and change round with the opposite man allowing the carrying arm to rotate. This was done as a drill taking only a couple of seconds which enabled them to maintain second place. With heads down, and legs digging into the sand, like pistons, each log fought to improve or hold their order of placing.

The object of this event was to see how the individual operated when called upon to function as part of a team. This log had to be transported by men of flesh and blood, from point A to point B, eight men would get it there quicker than seven or six, so it was up to each, no matter the pain or obstacles, to remain with his log pulling and straining at the toggle rope. As the logs plodded on, each one fighting to stay in touch with the leaders, no one from 770 bothered to look up to see where they were going, for the presence of Heart-Break Hill could be felt hanging above them.

Pain had gripped most runners in arms and legs, but exhaustion now began creeping into bodies as well, confusing minds and weakening self-determination, as feet struggled to find balance and firm footing amongst the loose stones, and miniature rain cut gullies that were the surface of this steep slope. Arms no longer carried the log, but now dragged it still in mid-air upwards. The two end men were in the worst position, practically pushing the full weight of the wood up the hill on their own. The log Roy Adams and Scouse Holgarth were on began to struggle, knees were weakening and ropes slacking as the weight and slope overcame the faint hearted.

This was what Corporal Kettler had been waiting for. When the log slowed and then paused, he began laying into the rear pair with a spare toggle rope he had wrapped around his hand, striking their

shoulders and back with the amateurish swings of a novice slave driver.

"Come on you bastards," he cried, "Get up that hill." Kettler's fun was ended by the fist of a man in a dark blue tracksuit top. who had rushed back down the hill. Kettler picking himself up off the gravel at the foot of the hill, found himself being grabbed by his shirt front, having to look into the angry face of Captain Plummer, the second in command of Recruit Company.

"Don't let me ever again catch you using a rope end on my men."

Captain Plummer bit off every word as it passed between his teeth, before releasing Kettler and running back up the hill to rejoin the leading logs. Kettler sulked for a week, unable to comprehend the seriousness of what he had been doing.

As the teams heaved their logs to the crest of the hill, tortured expressions said everything that minds and bodies were feeling. With sweat oozing from under helmets to stream down faces and arms, they continued along the ridge line, forced to double by screaming instructors and staff. Sinclair and Urwin's log was consumed in unbearable pain, they had not been given a change round since well before the hill, and now the carrying arm was being torn from its shoulder by the weight and strain.

Just before the route turned down off the hill a change was finally given, but Paddy Kieran didn't get a proper grip before the log began to move. As the team stepped over on the down hill slope he fought with both hands to gain his grip. Just as he was reclaiming the correct hold his feet twisted out from under him, sending him down onto the gritty surface. As he fell his wrist turned in the loop trapping his hand, causing him to be dragged face upwards under the log. Reg Berrill his partner on the other side of the log, shouted for him to get himself up. For there was nothing the others could do, gravity had increased the team's speed and couldn't have stopped to help even if they had wanted.

At the bottom of the hill the hand broke itself free, causing Kieran to be trampled under, first by Billy Kennedy and then by Andy Dawson. Sam Kyle gave a quick backwards glance to see Kieran roll onto his stomach then lie still.

Corporal Thomson seeing the log lose a man, now began to move around the team first to run beside one man then another. Encouraging, abusing, shouting, pleading, swearing, anything that he thought would make that person dig a little deeper to keep himself going. For five hundred metres his voice was non-stop, keeping their

pain-fogged minds centred on the most important thing in the world, carrying that log over the finish line. Despite the loss of a man, the team was still holding well in second place, about twenty metres behind but with the gap remaining constant.

Suddenly one of the P Company runners fell off the log, collapsing onto his knees at the side of the track. As Corporal Thomson's log passed him, he was seen staring with big watery eyes up at a Staff Sergeant instructor. He had seen it all before and gave no mercy.

"Look you equity-card carrying bastard," he shouted down at a budding Sarah Bernhardt, "Get up and get back on that fucking log, you skiving git." (The skiving git was a Royal Artillery Captain.)

Now that the two logs were back to equal numbers, the gap began to close, Corporal Thomson shouted and encouraged even louder, for both teams had broken from the shade of the tree-lined track into the trapped heat of the sand basin. Thomson in his last desperate attempt to spur his log to victory shouted, "Look, look, you're almost there just another three hundred metres and you're finished, now come on, you can win this race, open your legs, come on, come on."

For those who could still raise their heads, that finish line looked a long way in the distance. However the front team was just an arm's length away.

Out of the corners of his sweat stung unfocused eyes, Billy Kennedy noticed a pair of legs moving past him then closing into his front. Paddy Kieran had rejoined the log.

"Come on boys," Paddy shouted, "we can pass these fuckers."

With Kieran's renewed aid the log became that little bit lighter, adding speed which forced Urwin and Sinclair to move out to the left, inching up to and finally overtaking the end men. The last hundred metres the two teams performed what the British soldier revels at, refusing to let his mates down. The burst for the finish line was not a sprint, but it did produce speed, generated with energy that just didn't exist, and should not have aided legs and bodies forward, let alone cause the rush for the finish it did. In the end it was 770 Platoon's log that beat mind over matter, to place eighteen inches of telegraph pole over the finish line ahead of the other.

Most runners crashed to their knees in relief, but were quickly ordered to stand up and cheer the others in, by a beaming, back slapping Corporal Thomson.

The Friday morning Muster Parade was only attended by those who

would be going onto the Parachute School at Abingdon. Twenty three men responded to Sergeant Allander's command of, "Platoon A… tten…tion!"

Of those twenty three, seven were back-squaders which left from the original thirty-nine members, sixteen. Not a very good percentage, but then the system was not designed to produce maximum numbers. At the end of ten physically hard weeks, what was intended to survive were only those who proved to be determined and reliable. However this method was not foolproof and never pretended to graduate saints — far from it. Scouse Holgarth would prove to be one, committing a civil crime, that was to bring shocked humiliation and disgrace to the name of the Parachute Regiment.

P Company was also completing a final event that afternoon. This was the reading out of the course results. Of the one hundred and seven who had reported a fortnight earlier, only thirty-one now stood in the depot briefing room to hear the individual verdicts. Although thirty-one men had survived the course, not all would be automatically sent on to the Parachute School. Their overall performance had been judged, and were now to learn if they had achieved the standard expected of potential candidates joining the 16th Independent Parachute Brigade.

The course Sergeant Major standing to the centre of the stage began to read out the names and their results. If a man passed he stayed in the room, if informed he had failed, he left. On each individual the Sergeant Major was clear, cold and heartless. His statement did not need repeating. It began in alphabetical order:

"Alderson L. Private. Border line, pass. Bannister R. Lieutenant. Disappointing endeavour, fail. Fane C. Corporal. Uninspired performance, fail… . . "

On reaching the 'Ms' Bob MacIntyre, to his relief was given a border line pass. The last man, Ken Whyte also remained in the room with a distinguished pass. When the Company Sergeant Major told everyone left to sit down and await the Company Commander's course closing address, only nineteen pairs of knees bent.

CHAPTER 6

UTRINQUE PARATUS

On the Monday morning an RAF Officer gave his opening address in the Abingdon Airfield cinema, to the seventy three men who had qualified to take part in this, the station's present parachute course. The text of his talk was a series of dos and don'ts, but put across in a very humorous way which kept a constant ripple of belly laughter flowing from the audience. This introduction set the mood for the remainder of the course. In the coming weeks no matter how nervous one became, or how frightening the occasion, there was always an RAF instructor present to explain the funny side, or kill the tension with a joke.

At the end of the address, the students were marched away to a concrete space between two large hangars. There awaiting them were the RAF Sergeant instructors, who would each take charge of a squad of ten or so men.

After a short introduction from these instructors, the squads were taken into one of the large hangars for ground training. Here every student would spend many hours perfecting the technique of a parachuting soldier, getting the drills right on the deck before being allowed near an aeroplane. The squad Billy Kennedy found himself in was taken to an island formed by several coconut mats. There they were shown the basic body position a parachutist would adopt when about to arrive on the ground, while suspended below his parachute.

At ten o'clock everyone's awkward attempts were terminated for half an hour, while the whole course stopped to have a NAAFI break. This was a treat, for at the depot recruits were never allowed to have one. For the remainder of the morning, more ventures at the parachute position was made, then nursery rolls on the mats, still holding this odd stance. All the time the instructors kept hammering home the point, that as long as this position is held throughout the landing, no injury will occur to the parachutist.

The afternoon periods found Kennedy and his squad progressed onto two foot high ramps. From these, little hops were made either forward, sideways or backwards, again while trying to hold this newly learned parachute position, in mid-air, on landing and throughout the roll.

Through the first week, the squads like groups of tiny tots in an infants' adventure playground, journeyed around the hangar progressing from one fun game to the next.

Some of the training aids like the fan were enjoyable, this was simply a harness attached to a wire cable. The student would buckle the harness on, then when commanded to by an instructor, step off a platform to drop forty feet straight down. The cable was connected to a fan that beat the air as the man fell, slowing him down to a very light landing. An ingenious machine, which turned grown men into nippers who fought each other, to get on the ladder leading up to the exit platform for another go.

Reveille on Friday morning was 0400 hours, this early start was for a very good reason. Parachuting was limited to a wind speed of 15 knots or 18 miles an hour. If the wind exceeded this it was acknowledged to be too dangerous for men to be dispatched into its unpredictable gusts. Therefore the best time for parachuting was the early morning and late evening, when the conditions were at their calmest. This of course was no consolation to our heroes who had been pulled out of a warm bed, to huddle in the back of an open three ton vehicle, for a one hour, cold, draughty journey to the DZ (dropping zone).

This particular DZ, Weston-on-the-Green had been a grass airfield, now it was solely a dropping zone. No aircraft used its green surface for take-offs or landings, all this was done at Abingdon where the paratroopers would emplane then fly the twenty-five miles to Weston. For our course this morning there was to be no aircraft, instead a large egg shaped balloon, as big as a house, with chunky inflated tail fins, rocked gently on its anchor lines. This was to provide the students with the necessary altitude to jump from.

As the RAF balloon detachment prepared this monster, the would-be parachutists filed into one of the hangars to draw and fit parachutes. Once everyone had altered the harness webbing straps to fit his particular body size, the course was formed up in fours outside on the grass to wait their turn to jump. By this time the balloon had been attached to a winch cable, that was mounted on the back of a Bedford lorry.

Suspended below the balloon was a square wooden and metal open gondola called a cage. This device had proved to be a smooth inexpensive way of training parachutists. Four jumpers and an RAF instructor would climb into the cage, the winch would be let out to a height of eight hundred feet. Then one by one the parachutists would jump. The cage and the instructor are then reeled in, to the ground,

for the collection of another lift. In this manner as long as the weather held parachuting could continue, and, should it be wished, into the night as well, for darkness did not hinder it, merely adding another dimension.

As the first four men were led off in single file the hundred metres or so to take their positions in the cage as the first lift, everyone watched closely. Once on board, the balloon began to rise, straining at its cable for the freedom to climb and climb, dragging its gondola upwards with it. As the cable extended, a red flag was fixed every two hundred feet by one of the ground staff. On reaching eight hundred, a blue flag was waved from the ground, to indicate to the instructor in the cage that he could begin dispatching his charges.

From below, the awaiting audience first saw a figure dropping from the lip of the cage, followed by a distant but clear, 'go', given by the dispatcher. The parachutist dropped well down the cable with his rigging lines and parachute nylon streaming, until the canopy inflated, then closed, then again sucked in air to expand to its full capacity before continuing a now gentle journey to the ground.

"Does it always open like that?" Inquired Dawson of Sam Kyle.

"No, sometimes it doesn't open at all," replied Sam with a dead-pan expression.

"Ha, ha, very funny," mocked Dawson in return.

Kyle smiled before giving a straight reply. "Yeah once the rigging lines play out, the canopy will breathe before fully opening."

Most of 770 were well down the queue, so everyone was relaxed, sitting on the grass. Some had their helmets off allowing the early morning sunshine to warm their faces, an urn of tea was provided not far away, which caused a light stream of parachute clad men to travel to and from with paper cups in hands.

Reg Berrill was sat behind Sam Kyle and beginning to wish he wasn't. He had heard the joke about the parachute and found it unfunny. Sam's latest comment to Dawson about butterflies just beginning in his stomach hadn't gone down too well either. For his stomach felt as if it contained a fox flustered chicken coop, and had been that way since leaving Abingdon.

After another good hour's waiting the helmeted figures to his front began to thin. Finally Kyle's party was led off to the balloon. This was the signal for Reg and the other three of his lift, to line up for manifesting and an equipment check.

First an instructor took their names, then the registration numbers

of the main parachute, the static line, and the reserve parachute. This reserve parachute was attached by clipping it to the harness on the lower chest area. Should it be needed a red handle was to be pulled allowing this smaller canopy to spring out.

Next another instructor worked his way from man to man, methodically checking each item of parachute equipment the men wore, and finding something amiss with everyone he checked. Kennedy had a twisted helmet strap, Urwin his reserve clipped to the wrong set of D rings, Sinclair's leg straps were too loose. Reg lifted his reserve for the instructor to strike his quick release box and it did, causing the harness straps to fall away free. The instructor gave him a good-natured bollocking, for not making sure it had been in the locked position, but Berrill hardly heard him. He was too busy flapping over the thought of what would have happened, if he had jumped with the harness box unlocked.

Reg led the way in single file, towards the balloon cage in less than a perfect frame of mind. On taking their places in the cage, everyone tried to put on a brave face, with each fighting hard against varying degrees of fear. Billy Kennedy found it hard to swallow. Dave Urwin couldn't control one of his knees which continually shook. Jim Sinclair was thinking back, on the sweat and pain of the depot which qualified him for this opportunity.

'I must be fucking daft,' he thought. Reg, well Reg was just petrified.

As the safety bar was positioned by the dispatcher across the exit, one of the ground staff shouted, "Up 800, four men jumping." On this the winch man engaged the gears allowing the balloon to begin its climb. As the big silver egg moved up it caused the cage to lurch forward. This forced our brave four, to grasp for hand holds in a sudden nervous action, setting hearts pounding and eyes widening.

On the ascent no one spoke only grunting weakly, in reply to the instructor's jokes and observations, about where on the ground the best mushrooms were to be found. Although everyone was aware of the sky, sun, ground and the sparse puffy clouds, which produce a breathtaking panorama, that gained in width as the cage rose, it was never appreciated. The blue sky, purple horizon and Oxfordshire green was lost to people about to face the stiffest challenge of their lives.

On reaching eight hundred feet, the balloon cable brake was applied, causing the gondola and its occupants to tilt forward. This destroyed any composure the jumpers had mustered during the climb,

which again set hearts racing and knees shaking.

The dispatcher leaned over the open railing, to check for the blue flag. “OK,” he said. “We’ve been given the go ahead.”

With that he raised the safety bar, then turning to Kennedy, “Right number one, come forward.” Billy was only a few feet to one side of the exit, but he still made a meal of getting there. The cage was not a very stable platform, it gently turned and rocked below the balloon, as its great bulk attempted to resist the pressures of light breezes that moved at irregular times against it.

Kennedy arrived beside the dispatcher as if he had just learned to walk, only moving his feet when he had a firm hand hold.

“That’s it son, careful you don’t fall out,” grinned the RAF Sergeant. The joke was understood, but its humour failed to spark a response from our fearless quartet. The instructor now took control, ensuring by the tone of his voice that everyone understood he expected to be obeyed.

“Right number one, now let’s see a good exit position. Stand in the door,” with this command Kennedy’s mind unfroze. He had reacted to it so often during the hangar drills, he now found it a relief to check that his body position was correct, one leg forward, the other slightly back, body forced out and up with the head erect, eyes looking straight ahead, knees bent ready to spring forward. The arms to avoid them flapping about during exit were folded one on top of the other over the reserve parachute.

“Go!” Without hesitation Billy catapulted forward into space. The first four feet were fine, they were horizontal, then he began to drop. As the static line, which was secured to a metal bolt above the exit platform of the cage began to play out, it had the effect of restricting the parachutist’s fall, causing his legs to swing out and upwards. At the same time Billy was given the shock sensation of feeling his stomach rise into his throat. Just as his legs began to swing back below his body, he felt two stiff jolts that bobbed his head up and down, then nothing. Billy hung in the harness for a few seconds recovering his senses.

From the ground an Officer was shouting directions over a loud hailer. “Your canopy has opened number one, carry on.”

Billy now sparked to life remembering his drills. Looking up to check his canopy, ensuring there were no tears or holes, only the small round apex showing blue sky through the khaki-coloured roof, Kennedy’s hands reached up to grasp the two front lift straps, which with the back two forked up from his shoulders. These lift webs were

connected to the nylon rigging lines, which in turn were sewn to the peripheral band of the canopy. Billy now began to go through his flight drills. Spinning his head around checking that his piece of sky was clear, then assessing his drift, trying to determine which plot of ground he would land on.

As Mother Earth approached, the loud hailer again prompted him, "You are nearing the ground number one. Prepare for landing." Kennedy kept his hands on the lift webs adopting the parachute landing position, tucking himself tightly together. Then looking to the ground estimating which way he would land. Deciding he was drifting to the left he turned his legs and feet to the correct position for receiving a side left landing, and hit the ground back right. This gave him a head whip, ringing his helmet like a bell. No matter, he was up like a shot congratulating himself with little silent yippies, and yahoos.

As he struggled out of the harness, to rough pack it for carrying off the DZ, an instructor walked past, he asked Kennedy if he was OK, then continued on, looking upwards. Billy now remembered his mates and watched as the others landed. Berrill, the last to jump landed like the proverbial bag of dung, arms and legs flailing everywhere. The instructor stopped to point out to Reg his rudimentary faults, but he was too overcome with excitement to take much notice.

It was a very self-inflated course that sat down to lunch that day, with everyone going through their death defying leap in great detail. All had done exactly the same jump, but each related a different story.

Dave Urwin sat in the aircraft quietly shivering. His slot in the parachute stick was number three port, with the starboard stick opposite. The reason he was shivering was partly because this was his first aircraft jump, which meant he was nervous anyway, but mainly because of the rush of cold air that streamed in through the open door he was sitting beside. This had been left open by the RAF dispatchers for convenience during the short flight from Abingdon to Weston-on-the-Green. Numbers one, two and three on the port side had to sit to the rear of the door during flight, because the starboard and port doors were staggered, one forward of the other. This prevented the parachutists exiting both doors together, and meeting below the aircraft, which would cause them to entangle with each other.

Urwin, trying to take his mind off the approaching reality that he was shortly to chuck himself out of this perfectly serviceable plane, at first applied his thoughts to concentrating on events as they happened, but soon gave this up as the noise and cold began to overcome his will to observe and absorb what was going on. Instead he found setting his

mind on thinking of other things was the best anaesthetic for calming the inner panic that would periodically jump from his stomach to his throat.

In fact Urwin was only doing what everyone else in the aircraft was finding was the only option they had. All thirty parachutists, fifteen each side of the aircraft, sat on bench seats, parachutes on their backs. Most were sitting upright with their arms folded across the reserve parachute. Some kept checking their helmets and reserves, but other than these nervous reactions there was little else to do, for everyone soon found there was no point in trying to speak, the noise from the engines drowned all conversations.

The Hastings aeroplane was not designed for passenger comfort. Its function in life was that of air cargo, with no frills. The RAF had two mainstays for this work, both capable of a quick internal transformation to allow for parachuting. The Hastings was a conventional aircraft, cigar shaped body, two wings, four engines and a three finned tail. The second aircraft was something altogether different, it was a square plane. The Beverley also had four engines but there the similarity ended. Below the two huge oblong wings, hung a house-like pod, which was the cargo container; an upstairs attic window passed as the pilots' cabin. All in all, it looked more like an enlarged model of something you would buy in Woolworths' toy department, than one of the RAF's tried and proven work horses.

Urwin began to slowly creep out of his numbness as he became aware of the RAF dispatchers' activities. These two men had been patiently waiting in the centre of the aircraft, just forward of the exits, but now one was in the starboard door watching ahead to the DZ. Finally he stood back and gave his mate the thumbs up sign. With that the first three parachutists on the port side were signalled to stand up. For the men's first aircraft jump they were to be dispatched only three at a time. This enabled the watching instructors on the ground to note any mistakes without confusion of numbers, and allow the parachutist to practice his steering while minimizing the chance of collision.

"Check equipment." With that they began to feel about their body, starting with the helmet and working down. Then checking the parachute and static line of the man in front. Once the dispatcher had a quick check himself to ensure they had made no mistakes, he took up his post beside, but to the rear of the door. With knowledge gained by constant practice, he now began to judge the time it would take to reach the DZ. With his head half out of the door, squinting into the rush of air that slapped against his face, rippling the flesh in little constant waves, he watched through slitted eyes the grassy, hedge

bordered cube as it drifted steadily out from underneath the plane's wing. With a set expression the dispatcher stepped back to face the three men.

Over the roar of noise gushing in through the doorway they heard him shout, "Tell off for equipment check." On that command Dave Urwin struck Dawson's shoulder with his right hand, at the same time shouting, "Number three OK." This was the signal for Dawson to slap Wishart's shoulder with, "Number two OK." Whereupon young Wishart cried out, "Number one OK, port stick OK." Satisfied the dispatcher again began observing the ground.

After a longish pause he lifted his head to this time shout, "Action stations." All three men paced their way towards the door in a set drill, the front foot leading, with the rear foot following side on, stopping with the instep hard against the heel of the front foot. This way one foot never passed the other, reducing the possibility of tripping up.

From just behind the top of the pilot's cabin, two wire cables angled down the centre of the plane to an anchor point in the floor, fronting each exit door. These were the strong points within the aircraft, that the parachutists attached their static lines to. The static line was able to run free on this cable, but it had to be carried along with the inside hand of each jumper. As Wishart arrived one pace from the door, the dispatcher stopped him.

All three men now stood poised. Dave Urwin gripped his and Andy Dawson's static line, which he held straight armed in his left hand, his right folded across the reserve also in a grip with fingertips dug into the canvas outer covering, his eyes fixed on two lights one beside the other above the door. These lights one red, the other green, would light when the navigator was satisfied the aircraft was at the correct point of dispatch over Weston.

As he stared transfixed the red flashed on, this was the signal for the RAF dispatcher to shout, "Red on, stand in the door."

Wishart fighting through the fear, took one last pace forward to take up his final position, before the exit. Both arms now across his reserve parachute, head slightly forward, eyes fixed to his front not looking down, the toe of one boot just on the edge of the sill. The tension experienced by all in the aircraft was heavy and unavoidable, the circumstances saw to that. The roar from the engines and the howl of air as it cut through the doorway, added background noise to the drilled drama.

In the door the dispatcher was frozen, one hand holding Wishart by

the shoulder harness against any premature exit on his part, while his other hand was raised waiting to slap the paratrooper's arm as a signal to jump. With the loose material of his grey blue overalls snapping in the wind, his eyes remained set, looking up at the unlit green light. As it suddenly flashed on, stimulating Urwin like an electric jolt the dispatchers shouted. Wishart tried to drive out the door in a forceful exit, but his legs folded on him, dribbling his body over the edge instead: As he spilled out, Dawson followed. Turning square to make his exit, Urwin threw his static lines at the foot of the dispatcher, slapped the hand across his reserve locking it on to the opposite elbow, then shot through the doorway.

The slip stream struck the side of his body, rushing him gently away below the aircraft. Instead of the jerky bouncing experienced on the painful ground exit trainer, Urwin found himself swinging back and forth below a fully developed canopy. The relief flooded through to every point of his body, for not only did he find jumping from aeroplanes painless, it was actually enjoyable. With a little whoop, he began to jig a dance in his harness, broadly smiling as he twisted to observe his other two companions. Dawson he could see smiling like himself, obviously infected with happiness in the same way he was.

Poor Joe Wishart had tumbled about a bit when he faulted his exit. This in turn caused the parachute to twirl as it deployed, leaving him with twisted rigging lines. These were not dangerous to have, but it denied the jumper the ability to steer his parachute. The only answer was to kick out of them, spinning the body around until they untwisted. This was what Wishart was doing, only being inexperienced, he didn't realize he was kicking the wrong way.

On the ground, Urwin stood up to begin unfastening his harness, as he did so his eyes caught the aeroplane, turning away to begin the circuit for another jump run. Watching, he reflected on the contrast between the tension and apprehension within the aeroplane and the tranquil peace of this quiet green turf.

Three or four RAF instructors had scattered themselves over the area. But none rushed over to share the parachutists' joy, only Wishart who was ticked off for not clearing his twists before landing received any attention. All three packed up their parachutes, to begin the half mile walk to the hangars for a cup of tea, stopping only to look back at the next stick of three as they left the aircraft.

On Saturday night Scouse Holgarth and Paddy Kieran staggered through the camp gate drunk. Instead of going on to bed, they stopped to slag the RAF duty policeman in the guard room, whereupon the two rough tough paratroopers, suddenly found themselves spending

the rest of the night in the cells.

A fortnight later, having completed eight qualifying parachute descents, a parade to receive their wings was taken on the concrete square fronting the training hangar. The wings were given to each man by the Recruit Company Commander, who had driven up earlier that morning especially to take the parade. For 770 Platoon it was a short affair, a congratulation speech, followed by a walk through the ranks with a handshake and a set of wings for each recruit.

The P Company parachutists were also on parade, but off to a flank as a separate formation, for they had the added distinction of also receiving their red berets. This was given in a dramatic manner, for as the Major moved through the ranks from one man to the other, before giving the wings, he would first remove their old head gear to cast it to the rear of the parade. A maroon beret was then handed to the Major by a Colour Sergeant who was following, holding a stack like pancakes between his hands, this was placed on the bare head accompanied with the wings and handshake.

Bob MacIntyre was glad to see the back of his, it held no loyalties for him. But Ken Whyte had a remorseful twinge as his was thrown to the grassy verge. His father had died in North Africa in 1942, wearing the same distinguished badge as on that beret.

Dave Urwin had to knock twice before the door of his home was opened, but it was worth the short wait just to see the look on his teenage sister's face, when she realized the young man in uniform on the step was her brother.

"Dave, oh Dave, you look grand," she said exploding in a surprised smile. His mother and father were in the kitchen just finishing their Sunday breakfast. Both rose to greet him as his sister led him in by the hand. The rest of the day was spent with everyone fussing over him, saying repeatedly how proud they were of him.

After the Sunday dinner, Dave and his father walked around to his uncle's, where he promptly snatched Dave's beret off his head and placed it on his own with the challenge, "You don't deserve to wear this yet, you haven't killed Jerries like I have," and kept it there for over an hour refusing to take it off.

That evening all three went to their local bar, where father and uncle could show off their son and nephew. At closing time as they weaved their way home, casting erratic shadows across the sidewalk, caused by a bright shining moon, a hundred miles the other side of the

Irish Sea, Jim Sinclair was also taking a walk in that same bright moonlight.

With suitcase in hand, he was striding down the road leading from his father's farm to the river side Berry Garden owned by an uncle, his mother's brother. Both he and Dave Urwin had travelled overnight to begin their first week's leave. Urwin on the ferry to Belfast, he by rail to Glasgow.

However the welcome Sinclair received was less than that of Urwin's. His mother was happiness and smiles, but his father cold and unresponsive. While his seventeen-year-old brother showed nothing but bitterness towards him, spending the day making hostile remarks. This to Jim was understandable for with his departure, the brother had to take on twice the work. However, it came to a head that evening while watching television, when Jim offered to make tea for everyone. His brother declined saying sarcastically that he could have his cup, even though Jim hadn't contributed any work around the farm, to give him the right to have it in the first place. With this, Jim cracked, seeing red, he pulled his brother up out of his chair, sending him backwards over the family couch with a punch to the face. His father angrily jumped up grabbing Jim by the shoulder, but he was having none of it and without thinking, also hit him.

The room now suddenly became out of bounds to the newly qualified paratrooper. His mother crying with anguish the names of her sons, as she gripped the cushion of her chair with both hands. The brother rising unsteadily to his feet was wiping a bloody nose with the back of his hand, while the father lay unconscious, one foot hanging in the smashed glass door of the china cabinet. Jim without a word turned to his room, where he collected his suitcase, then left the house.

He cut off the moonlit road way, to take a familiar route across the fields and down to the banks of the Clyde. This had to be crossed by wading, but he knew of a shallow ford he had crossed as a youngster many times before. His aunt-in-law opened her back door to find Jim, suitcase in one hand, shoes and socks in the other. On confessing his story, all she said, with a knowing up and down movement of her head was, "You're your father's son James." The next morning he walked into Lanark to catch the midday train back to London, the rest of his leave being spent at the UJ Club.

On returning from the week's leave, 770 Platoon now entered its final phase of basic training. Although they were fully-fledged paratroopers, they still had a month's continuation training ahead of them, in order

to acquire the skills that an Infantry soldier would have to have before joining one of the regular battalions. And so they began, out among the woods, hillocks and gorse patches surrounding Long Valley.

Each day, normally in the afternoon they would be found with full battle order, learning the tricks of their chosen trade. How to patrol; where to ambush; how to take cover when coming under fire; what is looked and listened for when working at night; and a hundred other points on staying alive when called upon to do so.

These last four weeks in the depot proved to be just as hard as the previous ones, but at this stage an element of relaxation entered the daily programme. For starters they were now allowed to have a mid-morning NAAFI break. Also Sergeant Allander no longer nit-picked or threatened indiscriminately, instead his attitude to the platoon was more in the nature of an employer dealing with a trusted work force.

The days began to slip by hardly noticed, there was just no time. The men were too active taking in knowledge and in most cases actually enjoying the training.

Dave Urwin rubbed his hands together, to drive out the early morning chill of the cool October night nipping at his fingers. Not that he was cold, for the platoon had been on the march from Hankley Common since 0300 am, which kept the body warm, but not the hands. 770 Platoon had just finished the last field training they would do as a Platoon. It had been a short exercise beginning with a morning parachute drop into Hankley. Now the platoon was withdrawing back to the depot and a hot breakfast.

As the column of soldiers approached Aldershot, the morning dawn gave way to daylight with only the sun yet to appear, climbing out of Guildford to the East. On topping Hogs' Back ridge, the familiar sight of the Cambridge Hospital clock tower could be seen, which told them, as they dropped down towards Tongham Village, they were into the last few miles. This, the Friday before the Saturday passing out parade, was spent, not as some hoped in bed catching up on the missed sleep of the night before, but with inspections of uniforms, webbed belts, rifle slings and best boots to be followed by two hours' drill on the square.

Saturday morning was lively, everyone out of bed as soon as the Company Orderly Sergeant entered the room. For they were all aware that this was their last event as a recruit soldier. After breakfast they were inspected silly, first by the Corporals, then Sergeant Allander, then Lieutenant Ramsay had a go, finally by the Company Commander, prior to marching on the square. The man who would be

taking the parade was a General no one had heard of, but was reputed to be very brave and well decorated.

When he arrived the platoon presented arms. He then walked up and down the ranks inspecting the men, stopping now and again to talk to the odd individual.

This passing out parade was not intended to be a restricted affair. Each man within the ranks had achieved something to be proud of, which gave him a right to share this moment with his family or friends. With this in mind each recruit had been allowed to invite those he wished as guests of the depot to watch the ceremony. After the parade, everyone involved gathered in the NAAFI to meet and eat sandwiches.

Dave Urwin was near to tears of joy at one stage, for on making his way towards the NAAFI after returning his rifle to the armoury, he found his father and uncle both waiting for him. They had taken the Friday off from work to travel down to Aldershot, arriving that morning.

After the reception most of the recruits were freed on leave, which could begin as soon as they had collected their bags from the billet. The bulk of the platoon were awarded two weeks. This was embarkation leave, for 770 had been earmarked to join the 5th Battalion serving in Cyprus.

Some like Adams and Wishart, not yet eighteen, therefore ineligible to serve abroad, had to move that afternoon across Queens Avenue to join the 1st Battalion. Two others who would not be going on leave were Sam Kyle and Jim Sinclair; they both asked to forego this in order to join the battalion in Cyprus as quickly as possible. Sam because he had no home to go to, and Jim, now for the same reason.

Billy Kennedy was the last to leave the Platoon's billet, for he was out to square things with Corporal Kettler. The Corporal always had a few pints during the Saturday dinner break, returning to his bunk for a short snooze before tea. Kennedy gave him twenty minutes in which to slip off into a sound sleep, then with the precision of a man who had spent some time working out and preparing a thorough scheme, he set to work. With a screwdriver and a dozen five inch screws, he began to seal the Corporal's door. The screw holes he had drilled previously, which enabled him to finish in a few minutes. The holes were countersunk allowing Billy to conceal them with blanco and boot polish. Then he was out the door and on his way to the railway station.

It took Corporal Kettler some time to realize he was stuck in his

room. He almost broke his door key trying to force an already opened lock. The window he also found was unopenable, thanks to Billy and his little screwdriver, earlier that morning. Finally he smashed a window to attract someone.

Over the next three hours Kettler's predicament successfully upset and caused annoyance to the Guard Commander and most of the guard, the Battalion Orderly Sergeant, and the Orderly Officer. The Quarter Master and one of his storemen were also involved, on the key side of things, trying to produce one that would open this stubborn lock.

Finally the Pioneer Sergeant, called in from his married quarter was forced to crowbar the door open. Which after only a few inches showed everyone the truth of the problem. By then it was too late, for the door and door frame were splintered beyond repair.

The Quarter Master ended the incident with justice which came from an old soldier's logic. "Corporal Kettler, you obviously never screwed your own door shut, but you must have been responsible for causing something that set this act of retaliation against you. You will pay for this damaged door and its frame." And he did.

By then Billy Kennedy, having finished his tea, was just falling asleep in front of the family telly.

CHAPTER 7

But the principal failing occurred in the sailing,
And the Bellman, perplexed and distressed,
Said he *had* hoped, at least,
When the wind blew due East,
That the ship would *not* travel due West!

Lewis Carroll

Leaning on the railing of their troopship, facing the Southampton dockside, Dave Urwin, Billy Kennedy and Andy Dawson had a colourless view of sheds and quayside that extended off to left and right for several hundred metres. They had just spent the better part of two hours awaiting processing in one of these sheds by the administration and movement cell, after having that morning travelled down from Aldershot by train, as part of a re-enforcement draft to sail for Cyprus.

Now they watched in the dimming light of a mid-afternoon November day, as others boarded. At first it was a novelty to watch these, wearing a variety of head dress and cap badges, struggling up the steep incline of the single gangway that led from the wharf to the ship's deck. But gradually the three men were becoming bored. This was emphasised by Kennedy who had spent the last ten minutes trying to spit on a bottle floating in the narrow strip of water between pier and ship side. Dave Urwin was also bored, but happy to be on the boat away from the depot. For two weeks he had, with the others, been waiting in the Holding and Drafting block, every day becoming more tiresome.

Once they had their new Mediterranean uniform and tropic clothing issued to them, there was nothing else to do but sit and wait. The only events in the day worth looking forward to were meals and NAAFI breaks in the Smith-Dorrien Club.

Having spent the last six months in a state of perpetual motion this inactivity frustrated everyone. Finally Dave took the easy way out, getting drunk down the town with Paddy Kieran and Scouse Holgarth. However, on returning to camp he became separated from the other two, ending up in the middle of the Saturday night Staff parade.

The next morning he realized he must have done something wrong

for he awoke in one of the guardroom cells. All Sunday he spent in close arrest, to be on Monday morning marched in front of the Headquarter Company Commander charged with being drunk, disorderly and resisting arrest.

After the charges had been read out, the regimental policeman who had been on duty that evening gave his evidence. From the statement, Urwin heard just how big a clown he had been. Insulting the Duty Officer, threatening the Battalion Orderly Sergeant, then finally trying to fight off three of the guard who were ordered to escort him into the guardroom. After a thorough explanation of how serious the Army takes these acts of drunkenness and ill-discipline, by the grey-haired Major, he was asked if he would accept his punishment.

Dave not knowing or caring if he had an alternative replied, “Yes Sir.”

“Right Urwin,” came the sentence, “I award you seven days’ restricted privileges. March him out Sergeant Major.”

Restricted privileges, RPs or to call it by its most used nickname ‘jankers’. Urwin got off lucky, he should have been remanded for CO’s, where he would surely have been given at least a week’s jail, but the Army is not that rigid to its discipline.

Before Urwin had faced the Major for his crime, he had called for and read Dave’s record of recruit training. Sergeant Allander was also asked to give a character reference. By working hard, remaining cheerful and obeying all commands in his short Army career, Urwin had escaped the indignity of doing depot nick. Still, jankers was no picnic as he soon found out.

Starting that lunch break he had to report to the Duty Regimental Police for an hour’s work, then again at six that evening for three more, and six the next morning for another hour. At the 1000 pm. Staff parade each evening he appeared in Christmas tree order to be inspected by the Duty Officer. After a few days of this, the average soldier finds himself walking into walls. Dave was glad to be aboard, and away from the depot, his last jankers parade having been that morning.

“Come on,” said Dawson, turning away from the railing “Let’s go below and see what time scoff is.”

Andy could get away with using nautical terms like below, for he had been on troopers before. Having ten years earlier travelled by ship out to Hong Kong to join his county battalion, then on to fight a war in Korea. Dawson the senior soldier of the party had been appointed in command of the Parachute Regiment personnel, which made him

responsible for guiding everyone through this journey, and ensuring the correct number arrived at their destination.

Andy, in his late twenties, tall, thin, sandy-haired, with a boyish face that belied his worldly experiences, accepted the job with polite resignation for this added duty presented no stress to him. Although he seldom spoke of his history, our Andy had been around a bit.

On arrival in the sleeping accommodation, no one could give an answer to the question of when tea was. Some minutes later an announcement was given over the ship's broadcasting system, informing everyone that tea would commence at 1700 hours, but with half-hourly sittings, for the number of troops on board was so great, each deck had to be allocated a time. Andy Dawson's brood was billeted on C deck which meant almost a two hour wait.

With that little sickener most people began to find personal entertainment, reading, or playing cards, while others talked, or again wandered up on deck. The accommodations were never meant to be a home, its purpose was that of providing a man with a bunk to sleep on, while he was being conveyed from one port to another. The room the paras shared with fifty or so others, was large but with a low ceiling. The normal fixtures you would expect in a room this size, chairs, tables, lockers, didn't exist, instead three-tier folding bunks were all the furniture provided. These were bolted to roof and floor, standing back to back in neat rows parading the room.

There were several of these rooms all of which were the same. All situated in the stern half of the ship, and all occupied by junior ranks. Officers, SNCOs, WRACs, and families travelled in the more plush accommodation of the forward half, which was out of bounds to the single troops for obvious reasons.

The ship itself was in the twilight of its service for after almost thirty years this was to be her last trip. On returning to the UK. she would be sent to the breakers' yard.

For the last ten years the *Dunsmoir* had covered the milk run, from Southampton to Hong Kong and back again. Now with passenger air travel coming into its own, the heads of the Forces were finding it much more sensible to have a man transported to or from his station in hours, rather than confined and unproductive in a troopship for weeks on end. That evening this old grey lady sailed out of Southampton water for the last time.

The next morning everyone found themselves operating to a ship's routine. After breakfast, bunks were folded up and secured, the sea kit bag, the only article of luggage allowed was packed and stacked below

the bunk. The shock for most who thought they were on a sea cruise, was finding that a lot of work was expected of them.

The accommodations, companion way, canteens, galley (dining hall) and heads (ablutions), all had to be spotlessly cleaned. The men for these jobs, were drawn from those who would be leaving the ship at the earlier stops, that is, those posted to the Mediterranean stations. The remainder were banished to the deck area until after ship's rounds, which was the Captain's inspection, normally finishing at eleven.

For the rest of the day the men had the freedom of the ship; some however, were lumbered with other jobs, like Dave Urwin and Billy Kennedy who found themselves working all day in the galley. First cleaning pots and pans from the breakfast, then peeling potatoes in a grand manner. Eight of them sat around a huge round, water-filled caldron five feet across by two deep, each man with a sack of potatoes resting at his feet. It took three hours to peel the amount needed to fill this shallow well.

All that day the ship heaved and rolled across the water, for the weather had been stormy, with wind and rain adding effect to a bleak, white-capped sea. By last light that evening the *Dunsmoir* was well down the Channel and fast approaching the Bay of Biscay.

The morning of the second day presented most aboard with their first impressions of what hell must be like. The day before had a good percentage, either seasick or queasy from the movement of the ship, now it was to reach plague proportion. Many found it difficult to leave their bunks, many more couldn't take breakfast, others had it, then wished they didn't, for during the night the ship had entered the bay.

The weather in fact had improved, the wind abating slightly, the rain stopping and the sky although not clear, raised its cloud ceiling giving a wider view. This view though was only available for a few seconds at a time, the reason for this was also the reason why ninety percent of the passengers were holding their heads in their hands. The course of the ship was more or less south.

However, from the south west immense rollers like ripples on a pond, marched out of the vast Atlantic in an unending monotonous surge, which only ended in an exhausted foamy crash as they collapsed on the coasts of Spain, Portugal and Southern France. These large evenly-spaced rollers, gave the ship the similar task of a man trying to walk diagonally across a freshly ploughed field, but without legs to step over the turfs, the *Dunsmoir* had to claw and skid her way up, over and down each and every one.

On arriving at the bottom of a trough, the climb up the next had to begin, but because the wave was approaching from her front right, the ship with her bow rising upwards was forced to tilt alarmingly to the left. Once perched on the top of the wave, the whole ship thrashed away with her propellers out of water, while her point of balance rapidly shifted in a sickening lurch to the right and downwards. Whereupon the ship's weight, and re-engaging propellers took her racing to the bottom of the next trough. This went on for days without a let up.

For those brave enough to stand on the deck they were given only three views, sky, horizon and sea, sky, horizon and sea all over a one minute time lapse. This opportunity was taken by very few, for the majority, it was a case of suffer through and pray for a quick death. Billy Kennedy, while on his way to the galley one morning, passed poor Reg Berrill hunched at the bottom of a companionway step, grey with exhaustion and illness.

Reg was apparently paying no attention to the ship's resident Warrant Officer Class 1 of Engineers, who towered over him, uniformed in immaculate battle dress, his voice booming out sound directions to the wretch huddled on the steps below him. "Come on now laddy, get up top side and suck that sea air into your lungs. That'll put you right."

Within Reg's tormented mind his answer to that advice was, that if he could get himself up on deck, he would have done so long ago and carried on the movement straight over the side.

Of course Billy didn't understand too much of all this agony going on around him, for he and five others, were the few out of the whole five hundred troops aboard who could sit in the galley, enjoy a meal and keep it down.

Although the ship's routine was not abandoned, it did turn into a bit of a farce. Jobs were done by those able enough to do them, but because of the circumstances the inspection had to be carried out with a blind eye. There was vomit everywhere, in all containers and on every surface. As soon as one area was cleaned, it was back again either carried there by the pitch and roll of the ship or deposited from uncontrolled stomachs.

Each meal time Billy Kennedy, Dave Urwin and the other unaffected four, would sit at one of the long bolted down dining tables, eating the five star grub that the cooks dutifully served up. The only thing that would put them off was the sight of the poor pathetic individuals with the appearance of Belsen inmates, who would force

themselves down to the galley to try and eat something for the good of their neglected innards.

Some got to the door where the aromas sent them reeling back clutching their mouths. Others would make it as far as the dining tables with something on their trays. But few stayed once the solid food began to arrive in the stomach. Urwin watched one soldier approach the food-laden hot plate only to uncontrollably spew a stream of vomit straight onto a full tray of braised steaks.

On the evening of the fourth day at sea, the ship's public address system informed the passengers that the lights of Cape St Vincent could be seen off the port side of the ship. Most of those listening were still beyond caring, but unknown to them it was a sign of relief, for this signalled the entrance to the Straits of Gibraltar and the beginning of calmer Mediterranean waters, and not before time.

The physical exhaustion through constant sea sickness had many on the point of a mental breakdown. Even Billy Kennedy was finding his stumbling erratic journeys around the ship, fighting for balance against the measured rhythmical roll and pitch of the boats unending uphill and down hill battle, no longer an acceptable annoyance, three days of it was long enough. Even the novelty of watching his metal meal tray career away from him, down the sudden sloping of the dining table to clatter against its guard rail, then drop back again as the slope reverses itself, was no longer amusing.

The rising sun at first blinded those who were observing it. But on climbing, its rays began to reflect off a small pyramid of land. This was the peak of a large hill that was to continue for some hours, to rise straight out of the sea. Its name in the past had been the Pillars of Hercules, but was now called the Rock of Gibraltar. However, to the troops she was simply 'Gib' or 'the rock'.

For those on the *Dunsmoir* the morning light brought a far more welcome sight, a flat sea. During the night the rollers had finally been left behind, putting smiles on faces and causing breakfast queues in the galley. The ship's routine was once more in full effect, giving jobs to people who were just grateful to be able to walk about, and hold their food down.

No stop was made at Gibraltar, for although Britain still claimed Sovereignty, and was strongly represented by all three services, the *Dunsmoir* had no one to disembark at that station.

This was just the first of the United Kingdom's garrisons that literally span the globe. For after decades of being the world's policemen, a self-imposed one, of defending her Empire, she was still

involved in the task. However, there was little financial reward for it in this age, she was merely honouring alliances and defence agreements. The reason for the *Dunsmoir's* journey was because of those agreements.

The soldiers on board were going as the representatives of a nation that was prepared to keep her word. The first stop for the *Dunsmoir* would be Malta; there, infantry and gunners would join their Regiments. Also departing would be tank men from the armoured corps and more infantry, they would be flown on, by plane to the Tripoli, Benghazi and Tobruk garrisons on the North African coast. At Cyprus where a full brigade was stationed the Paratroopers and others would be leaving. Allowing the ship to then journey through the Suez Canal to the large military base of Aden and on to Kenya where she would lose more of her passengers.

The two long, last legs were across the Indian Ocean to Singapore, supplying men to the units spread about Malaya and Borneo, then finally up the China coast to Hong Kong. With a battalion permanently in Jamaica and RAF and Naval stations scattered throughout the world, Britain was well and truly fulfilling her share of ensuring international stability.

After Gibraltar it did turn into a sea cruise, two full days of blue Mediterranean, sky and water, with not a ripple or a wave all the way to Malta. As soon as the ship anchored in Valletta Harbour, floating 'barra' boys, in small boats came along side to hawk the local novelties to the troops. If an article was liked a price would be haggled over, should it be bought, the money and the article, would travel up and down in a basket hoisted on a rope pulley.

Billy Kennedy came into his own here, applying East London market knowledge with subtle cunning. Aided by this and a constant non-stop spiel, he soon had the better of the locals.

This was a twenty-four hour stop for the *Dunsmoir,* so shore leave was granted to all on board, except those involved in duties. For the young soldiers this was an opportunity not to be missed, a day out in a foreign country. Even the stale dry smell in the air that was a trademark of all the Mediterranean coast countries, oozing from lands that had been lived on by man for far too many centuries, didn't put them off. In fact the sights, sounds and the smells of the near shore only heightened their curiosity, whetted their appetite to see, touch, discover and get drunk.

After wandering around sampling Malta's local colour, the soldiers got down to what they are best at: drinking and whoring. For

Valletta's red light district was world famous. It was called the Gut, just one single alleyway that dropped in large steps from the fashionable shopping area down to the harbour front. Off this alley in the shops and bars, for the right price you could buy anything.

Andy Dawson drained his glass, then pushed his chair back.

"Come on lads, let's get back aboard, we don't want to find ourselves on extra duties for the rest of the trip, just for being late."

His two drinking mates Reg Berrill and Dave Urwin both agreed, also standing up to cross the bar heading for the door. Several paces from it, a bar girl rushed in with a worried expression on her face. Closing the two swing-hinged doors she looked back over her shoulder. In a raised voice, but trying not to shout, she warned everyone in the room, "The animal, the animal."

This obviously meant something locally, for the two bar men, jumping from behind their counter, quickly placed two large wooden beams across the closed door. Once the entrance had been secured the bar girl turned to the customers with a finger pressed to her lips.

Andy Dawson turned to a sailor seated at a near-by table, "What's going on mate?"

The sailor's answer came in a low voice, "Marine, big bastard and mean as hell when he's drunk."

From the closed doorway, a worried chorus of shushes, directed by the barmen and the girl, was angrily hissed towards them. In the silence that followed, a series of bangings could be heard working its way down the alley. The main lights were then switched off, leaving only a single lamp beside the cash register still on.

Finally the banging arrived at their door, accompanied by scratching and snarls. The bar men retreated silently backwards into the centre of the room, while the girl cringed down one wall, steadying herself with an outstretched arm as she moved. A weight was now pushing against the door, trying several times to break in. After these last assaults it decided to move on to the next bar.

Reg was the first to speak. In a low voice he suggested, "Andy let's have another beer."

The three Paratroopers tiptoed across to the bar counter.

Twenty minutes later they were hurrying up the steps of the alley, when Dave suddenly stopped and called the others back.

"What's up Paddy? We're pushed for time you know," stated Andy

in a semi-cross voice.

“I just spotted a couple of our lads in this bar here,” said Urwin, pointing to a small doorway.

“OK, let’s see,” replied Dawson stepping through the entrance.

What they found was Scouse Holgarth and Paddy Kieran. Holgarth drunk, but sober enough to realize it was time to rejoin the boat, was trying to get Kieran to come with him. Paddy also drunk, but in no mood to leave just yet, thought he was on to a good thing and was looking forward to getting his end away.

“What’s with you two blokes?” asked Andy, “We’re due back in fifteen minutes.”

Holgarth stood beside their table, belt and beret on, Kieran sat with his feet up on another chair, his belt pushed through one epaulette of his BD blouse, the beret in the other. Holgarth jabbed a thumb at Kieran.

“He wants to stay, thinks he’s getting off with dis bird.”

A woman, slim, dark and unsmiling, sat beside him, a cigarette held in one hand a few inches from her lips, the whisky glass she was drinking from contained coloured water. Her face looked thirtyish, but this was occupational wear and tear, she was nearer twenty.

“Come on Paddy, leave the bint, we’re going to be late,” directed Dawson.

Kieran smiled back through half glazed eyes.

“Not yet Andy, me and this little darling have got plans for later on, haven’t we?”

Kieran’s arm was now around the woman’s shoulder, his hazy eyes fixed on hers. Dawson looked at his watch then stepped around the table to grip Kieran’s forearm.

“It’s too late now Paddy, if you wanted a short time you should have had it when you came in.”

Kieran jumped up, pulling his arm away.

“Short time, who said anything about a short time. She’s and me are going to have an all-nighter. The ship don’t leave until the mornin’, I’ll see you then.”

Dawson was becoming short-tempered.

“Look Paddy, stop fucking about, now come on,” Dawson emphasising his remark with a sharp jab of his finger towards the

door.

“Fucking about, you’re the ones that’s fucking about, now piss off and leave me enjoy myself.”

With that Kieran made to sit down, but was pulled up and out from behind the table by Dawson.

“You’re coming,” said Andy marching him towards the door.

“No I ain’t ya bastard,” shouted Kieran as a left hook circled towards Dawson’s head.

Andy ducked under it, coming up in a half crouch with two tightly closed fists, that flashed almost simultaneously onto Kieran’s jaw, sending him straight over backwards onto a table.

“Give us a hand lads, we’ll have to carry him now,” said Dawson, grasping one of the unconscious man’s arms.

It would be several months before Paddy learned he had just been knocked cold by an ex-army middle-weight boxing champion.

Billy Kennedy, who had been one of the few on board unfortunate enough to find himself on duty, watched from a porthole window as his mates returned. At the harbour edge, water taxis waited to transport personnel back and forth from their ships. All five quickly scrambled into one of these. Someone who looked as if he couldn’t stand, collapsed or was dumped at the bottom of the shallow craft.

Propulsion was a single oar, but operated from the stern by the taxi driver, who dipped it in the water, then pumped back and forth, causing a fish tail effect that pushed the boat forward at a sedate glide. From the deck above Billy’s porthole, a voice boomed across the water, “You there, get a move on, you’ve got three minutes.”

This warning triggered spontaneous panic within the taxi. First voices were raised, directed at the Maltese oars man, then arms began to gesture, finally two figures took control of the oar, pushing the driver out of the way. At the porthole, Kennedy began first to chuckle at the antics below, as the little boat began to increase its speed, by the two Paratroopers pumping like demons; then he broke into full laughter as the course began to zig zag, then suddenly shoot off at right angles, heading for the open sea.

The two amateur navigators, Holgarth and Urwin, let the craft drift, while they argued over whose fault it was. Andy Dawson stood up, to move towards them in an attempt to have motion resumed again, but as he did so Paddy Kieran, from the bottom of the boat, awoke and sat up. Seeing Dawson, he immediately began punching.

Andy, caught off balance, fell backwards with Kieran scrambling on top of him. Reg Berrill in an effort to restrain Kieran, leaped on his back. Urwin and Holgarth ignoring the fight, decided to again attempt forward speed. This they did in all directions, not to mention a longish half-circle back towards the quay side. All the time a thrashing of arms, legs and hands could be seen emerging, then disappearing again in the bottom of the boat.

Billy Kennedy was in hysterics, tears flowing from his eyes, his hands gripping the porthole, to stop himself from collapsing on the deck. Above him tempers were snapping with several people shouting orders and directions, followed by curses and threats.

After having been just about everywhere else in the harbour, the taxi at last arrived against the gangway, that hung suspended from the *Dunsmoir's* side.

Andy Dawson was sitting on Kieran's chest, his hands around the younger man's throat.

"Listen you stupid Irishman, when I let you go get yourself properly dressed, walk up those steps and get into your bunk. If you don't, there's some MPs up there, just itching to throw you into the brig for the rest of the journey." Dawson hissed each threatening word.

Kieran finally seeing sense replied, "OK, OK Andy, just let me up."

The Duty Officer, the Orderly Sergeant and the two Military Policemen at the head of the steps eyed the Paras with half smiles on their faces, but made no mention of the fact they were ten minutes late. It was a bind being on duty anyway, so all comedy relief was gratefully welcomed.

There were not the facilities for docking at Famagusta harbour, which was the reason why Dawson's party was being taken from ship to shore by an Army Royal Engineer launch.

It was nearing nine o'clock, as the new replacements scrambled up onto the concrete harbour wall, to be met by a Captain from the battalion and a Private, his driver. Both were in uniform, but of a different pattern and material to the battle-dress they wore. The KD (khaki dress), was a light sand colour, cotton jacket and trousers.

However, the point of dress that caught everyone's eye was a diamond tartan patch, sewn to the beret just behind the cap badge — this was the battalion insignia. While the other three of the brigade had coloured lanyards, 5 Para had this tartan patch, adopted during its formation in 1941, to signify that the bulk of the soldiers were drawn from the Cameronians.

Transportation down the south coast to Limassol, where the battalion was stationed, turned out to be a rickety wooden-framed bus, hired for the purpose from a local firm. The journey, they were told, would take three hours.

Unseen until now, a Parachute Regiment Officer had also arrived on the *Dunsmoir*. This wasn't significant to the young Privates, but Andy recognized it as either shyness or the height of snobbery. When travelling together, the first action an Officer should take is to make himself known to the junior ranks of his regiment, especially aboard a troop ship.

After the Captain had introduced himself, telling the new officer he would be completing the journey to Limassol with him in his Land Rover. He, tall, blond and arrogant, immediately placed his suitcase and grip on the ground, telling the driver to put them in the back of the vehicle. Andy was wrong, Second Lieutenant Nigel Roe was neither shy nor a snob, he was a prick!

This trip was to be a peaceful one, in which everyone could sit back on the wooden seats and stare through the glassless windows. Few realised that only a year or so earlier, they would have been armed or under escort, for the Greek terrorist organization EOKA was at that time still trying to gain its freedom from British rule, in order to implement unification with Greece.

Britain, as per normal, was yet again caught in the middle of a dilemma. If she had handed over effective control to the Greek population this would have caused friction, and inevitably would have led to fighting with the Turkish community, which would have triggered off intervention by either Turkey or Greece, undoubtedly leading to war between those two countries. This of course could not be allowed, because of the NATO Alliance Pact, which both countries belong to.

The only answer in the end was to give the island its independence, jointly governed by elected representatives of both sides of the Greek and Turkish population. Although over, the war was still far from forgotten, and was to smoulder for a number of years to come.

While the fighting did last, it was a time of bombings and back shootings, cordoning and searching of villages and reprisals. In the end no side came out of it with a clean conscience — everyone, Greek, Turk, and British found they had unnecessary blood on their hands — but in a terrorist orientated campaign this was inevitable.

After two hours, the bus stopped for a break at a lone coffee house, sited on a main road junction. This was known as the halfway house,

and a regular watering hole for all Military vehicles passing by. Billy Kennedy went looking for a toilet, but came back to the counter where a queue had formed awaiting service.

“Where’s the shitter mate?” Billy asked of the Cypriot serving drinks and rolls.

“Toilet in the back, you go around side of building,” replied the dark-skinned waiter.

“Yeah around there,” answered Billy, pointing back the way he had just come. “I’ve just been there. All it is, is a hole in the floor,” complained Kennedy.

“Yes, yes,” was the local’s reply, not looking up, being too busy making ‘espresso’ coffee for the queue.

“That’s all you’re going to get Billy, you’re in wog land now,” stated Dawson.

“But fuck me Andy, have ya seen it. It’s just a hole. How am I supposed to aim, I’d shit all over my boots.”

Although the bus had been following the coast road, its proximity with the sea was limited to the odd meeting and glimpse. As the bus climbed a winding rise to crest its top, the view beyond was a contrast to what they had been passing through for the last hour. The uncultivated rough hilly scrub land, could be seen to end at the base of this hill, whereupon a rich green half-basin stretched several miles away to the west and north.

On the coast in the centre of these agricultural fields and orchards lay the port of Limassol, around which a new bypass bent to the north of the town, revealing to the passengers on the bus the bungalows and apartments of the expanding suburbs, with their fresh bright-coloured plaster walls and tiled roofs.

After another mile, a right fork had the bus climbing a low foot hill, where shortly they approached a drop barrier manned by a soldier in a black beret, the barrier being up, the bus was merely waved through. On this hill were two camps, the first of pre-war wooden billets was occupied by a County Battalion, while further on surrounded by its own barbed wire fencing was the second, consisting mainly of tents, but showing here and there the odd bright sun reflecting tin billet. This was the home, for the present, of the 5th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

At the entrance to the camp, as is found with most regimental bases, was passed the guardroom, where two unsmiling RPs stood on the veranda eyeing the bus and its passengers, as they slowed to

negotiate the corner turning.

Behind the guardroom was a high-wired compound with two open-sided tents perched on concrete foundations. This was the battalion jail, with at present a population of three, each sat on their beds, either bulling a boot or polishing brass. Journey's end was in front of one of the newly erected tin buildings. A sign told everyone that this was the Battalion Orderly room.

The Captain who had met them at the boat, reappeared to tell everyone to de-bus and fall in, in threes. His briefing to them was short, consisting of a welcome to the battalion and that they would all soon have an interview with the Adjutant, who would be assigning them to a Company.

The interviews began almost immediately, with the new draft passing into the Adjutant's office one at a time. Andy Dawson cautioned Urwin, Kennedy and a few others, to hang back and go in last; that way they may be posted to the same Company. When the last man had been seen, a Corporal appeared to inform everyone that he was taking them to dinner.

He made no effort to impose his authority on the new men, by marching them across to the large galvanised metal cook house, that sat like a huge armadillo in a shallow basin, on the far side of the camp. Instead he waved his arm in a lazy underhand motion as he suggested to everyone, "This way."

Billy Kennedy just knew he was going to like this posting, for so far everything he had seen, seemed to be a complete reversal to what had happened in the depot. No screaming NCOs, no standing to attention for everyone, no marching about swinging arms shoulder high, even the dress or lack of it was a pleasant shock. Those on duty had to wear the KD but normal working dress around the camp was boots, with grey woollen socks rolled down, PT shorts and beret.

It was more an undress than a dress. Add to this the fact that it was mid-December, and the temperature was 22°C, with not a cloud in sight. 'Yes,' thought Billy, 'this is going to be a bit of alright.'

After the meal, the men returned to the area of the BOR. Now however, everyone took shelter in the shade of some near-by leafy carob trees.

The army didn't choose this camp for the scenic value, it was just a plot of land, unfarmable, and well away from local habitation. But in doing so the planner's choice couldn't have been better.

Urwin in silence, through half-shaded eyes, drank in the sight. To

his front, the green of the basin spread away south to the mixed colour of the town and the blue of Akrotiri Bay beyond. To the east, from the direction they had travelled that morning, there was little to see but dry scrub-covered hills. However, to the west, the eyes had more to admire. As the farmland ended, a plain, thinly covered in carob trees, extended into the hazy distance to finish at a thick belt of scrub, that undulated still further westward, until it was halted at a high escarpment that now stood out purple in the heavy haze. Atop this escarpment, although it couldn't be seen was another Army camp, Episkopi, a Signals HQ base.

To seaward of this a large L-shaped spit of land jutted a couple of miles out into the Mediterranean, then east, parallel with the shore for another five. In the middle a salt lake had formed, fed by seepage from the sea. The eastern entrance had long ago been sealed, by a sand bar extending from the main land, to a point about a mile up from the tip of the peninsula.

Over the years a salt flat a mile wide had built itself behind the sand bar, which was ideally being used by the battalion as a dropping zone. The spit itself had recently been turned into an RAF Base, RAF Akrotiri, which among other things was a 'V' bomber station.

Although Cyprus had achieved independence, Britain insisted that she retained areas on the island which allowed her to have substantial forces in the Western Mediterranean, which could be called upon immediately should the need arise. These were called sovereign base areas and were mostly situated like Limassol, Episkopi and Akrotiri on the south coast, but with an air base and some Army units inland at the capital, Nicosia.

Dawson's plan had worked a treat. the Battalion Orderly Sergeant read out the names of who would go to which Company. As he mentioned a Company by its letter, he would point to a spot of ground that he wished those named to stand on. As he barked, "'C' Company," the names read out were, BerriII, Dawson, Holgarth, Kieran, Kennedy and Urwin.

His next words were directed at a soldier dressed in KD with a bugle slung over his shoulder.

"Bugler, sound COSs."

On that command the soldier placed the instrument to his lips and began to blow a series of notes. This was a call to the COSs to come at the double. As the Corporals one by one appeared, the Sergeant waved them over to him, indicating he was the person they were being called to see. As they halted to attention in front of the red-sashed Sergeant,

each stating which Company they represented, the BOS would give them a list of names on a slip of paper, and point to a group of new arrivals waiting apprehensively on their assigned plot.

Charlie Company's COS halted before the Sergeant to report himself. Receiving his list, the dark stocky JNCO turned to his new charges, to check that the names and bodies corresponded. He began to speak in an unmistakable Welsh accent.

"Now look in to me and listen for your names. I don't want anyone coming to my Company that doesn't belong, you see."

With that he read out the names, looking up each time to see who answered. Satisfied, he attached the list to the mill board he carried, then directed the group to pick up their sea kit bags and follow him.

The Company lines were not far: back towards the cook house, then uphill a hundred or so metres. They halted at the steps of a small shiny tin building, that doubled as the Company office and stores. Lance Corporal Williams, now made them fall-in in single file facing this building, then, leaving them, he entered the office to report their arrival.

The man who first emerged from the office, to stand on the veranda gazing down on them, was Company Sergeant Major Stanley Vallis. With his legs slightly parted, head erect, shoulders well back, his arms clasped behind him, he stared down at the waiting men.

On first sight this man looked to be one hundred percent soldier, tall, slim hipped, a thin dark moustache centred on a tanned handsome face, dressed in a starched, tightly tailored KD uniform that highlighted his Apollo physique. And a good soldier he was, Vallis knew his job and handled the men well, but behind the image, the Sergeant Major was also frightened of parachuting, hated women, was a phantom knob-gobbler, enjoyed pulling wings off captured flies and was a founder member of the 'Huddersfield Hop-a-Long Cassidy' fan club.

Without altering his stance, he began to speak in a raised measured voice, while looking along the new faces.

"My name is Vallis, I am your new Company Sergeant Major. I won't welcome you to the Company, for the OC will do that in a moment. When he does come out of the office, I will call you to attention. Let's see you react sharply."

As if on signal a tall heavily-built man, thick around the waist but muscular, dressed in PT shorts and boots stepped through the office door, adjusting his beret with both his hands as he came. The

command, “At-ten-tion!” shrilled from Vallis’s lips. The OC continued off the veranda to face the new men, where his first words were, to stand them at ease again.

“Good afternoon, my name is Major Hanning, I am now your Company Commander,” he began. “First let me welcome you to the Company and to Cyprus. You quite frankly have struck it lucky, the battalion has another ten months left of this tour, and it will be filled with plenty of enjoyable training and recreation. However, the training will be hard, and the recreation hard-earned. For most of you this will be your first time abroad, so let me give you a word of advice. Limassol has everything to offer, wine, women, and more, but indulge it in moderation. This is a wonderful island, you will have time to get about and see many parts of it. Do that, for at present too many of this Company are drinking themselves silly and chasing a dose. My last point, keep your noses clean. I deal very harshly with the people who come before me on orders. Now before I turn you over to the Colour Sergeant for your bedding and equipment issue, are there any questions?”

Dawson came to attention, but remained silent awaiting to be told to speak. Major Nanning waved an open palmed hand at him saying, “Yes, what’s your name?”

“Dawson Sir, it’s our baggage from the ship, Sir, all we have at the moment is our sea kit bag, the rest we were told to leave.”

The OC turned to look up at his CSM. Vallis rocked forward a couple of inches.

“This is being collected by lorry from Famagusta tomorrow morning Sir, they will have to make do until it arrives.”

The Major turned back to Dawson without speaking. Dawson thanked him and stood at ease.

“Oh, Dawson,” the OC began again, causing Andy to come smartly to attention once more. “I understand you were placed in charge of this new draft, for the voyage out?”

“Yes Sir,” replied Dawson.

“Were there any problems on the journey?”

“No Sir,” was Andy’s crisp reply.

“Good, well done.”

Andy Dawson immediately graded his new OC above average. Most Officers he had known, wouldn’t have taken the time or even cared to acknowledge his responsibility as senior soldier during the boat trip.

The final act of Major Hanning's was to personally allocate each man to his new platoon. The rifle Companies had three of these, each numbered, starting with No. One in 'A' Company. Billy, Reg and Dave were assigned 8 Platoon. Andy, Paddy and Scouse 9. Some moments later Lance Corporal Williams was leading them towards the tent lines, but on nearing the first tent, a voice they knew stopped the new men in their tracks.

"Hey, you crows get your knees brown." It was Jim Sinclair; he and Sam Kyle, having arrived six weeks earlier, appeared from behind a canvas corner, beaming smiles, all mahogany-tanned from the Cyprus sun.

"Who you calling a crow, Sinclair, you six month wonder," retorted Dawson good-naturedly.

This was followed over the next few minutes with a series of quick fire questions from both sides. Turning to the Lance Corporal Sam asked, "Where you taking them Taff?"

"Three to 8 and three to 9," was the reply.

"Me and Jim will show them where to go, if you got something else on."

Williams pondered this for a quick second then said, "OK, make sure they find a bed space. I'll be back soon to take them up to see Ducker to draw bedding and equipment."

The Company lines were two straight rows of four men tents, with concrete flooring, which sloped from the Company office downhill almost to the cook house. 'C' Company was not alone on this slope, all the rifle Companies had their tent lines there. 'B' Company was to the left of 'C', with 'A' to the left again of 'B', further on across a space of ground were the battalion showers and wash houses; beyond them more tents. These belonged to Support Company, who consisted of three specialist platoons, the Machine Guns, the Anti-Tanks and the Mortars.

Further still were even more tents; these were HQ Company, they were the odds and sods of the battalion, Cooks, MT Drivers, Drums Platoon, Signals Platoon, Medics, Intelligence Section, and dozens of others who were the bits and pieces that made the battalion function as a highly professional military unit.

Kyle and Sinclair who were members of 8 Platoon led Urwin, Kennedy and Berrill through the concrete pathways of the green and brown — but in most cases, well sun-bleached — tents to their new home.

“Here you are, there’s a spare bed in here,” said Kyle turning to point into a tent.

“And two, up in that one, take your pick.”

“Where you Sam?” asked Billy.

“Me and Jim are in here,” nodded Kyle at the first tent.

“OK, that’s for me,” said Kennedy with a smile as he pushed in through the tent flap.

“Oh,” groaned Urwin, stooping forward to shout into the tent after Kennedy, “Who’s shagging who here, Kennedy?”

“You got it all wrong,” grinned Sam.

“Billy needs me like a son needs his father.”

“Bollocks,” replied Urwin, also with a smile. Then, turning to Berrill, “Come on Reggy, let’s see what our accommodation’s like.”

The tents held four single beds, with a six foot steel locker, a small bedside cabinet and foot mat beside each. Furniture for the room was one six foot folding table, four wooden folding chairs, with, in the winter one paraffin stove. Lighting was a single electric bulb hung from the tent roof.

That evening the new arrivals were taken to meet the Chai Wallah for a bedtime snack. During its long association with India, before NAAFI came into existence, the British army had relied on the natives to provide a non-alcoholic canteen service. Finding it to be a lucrative business, most British units found themselves with a squad of Indian tea boys prepared to sell drinks, rolls and meals at almost any hour’ of the day or night. Both parties readily accepted the service. The soldiers grateful for the availability of the scoff, and the Indians happy to have the franchise. In point of fact the nationality of these copper-skinned mobile cafe caterers stopped being Indian some years before, they were now Pakistanis.

During mid-morning and evenings, the Chai Wallah would trundle his wares down from his own tent, on a low-wheeled trolley, to a spot under a broad leafy carob tree beside the shower building. This was a point just about central to the whole battalion. On his arrival a steady stream of soldiers would amble across to this spot, to collect a hot drink and a roll or two. Urwin on gaining the head of the queue, found a smiling grey-haired, clean shaven gentleman squatting cross legged on the ground. Dressed in a white shirt, white pantaloon trousers, with an old brown European suit jacket, and worn light-coloured leather sandals. On his lap, opened, was a wine coloured,

dog-eared ledger. Seeing Urwin he spoke first.

“Ah, you are also new, what is your Company?”

Realizing some of the others of the draft had been here earlier he quickly replied, “‘C’ Company.” Looking down the Chai Wallah began to turn the pages in the ledger, talking to himself as he did so.

“Charlie Company, Charlie Company, yes,” he stopped turning the pages to look up at Urwin. “Your number will be 97, now you must remember this number, every time you come here, now what is your name.”

Dave nodded assuring him that he would remember. As the name was entered in the ledger, Dave was asked his order by one of the other two younger Chai men; one handing out rolls from a large square tin, the other making hot drinks with the aid of water from two copper kettles, kept warm over a set of gas burners. On handing his mug across for filling, he attempted to pay with a Cypriot ten shilling note, when Jim Sinclair stopped him.

“It’s all on tick Dave, we square-up once a week on pay day.”

As he waited for the mug to be filled, impatient voices were raised further down the queue.

“Come on ya black bastards, hurry it up.”

“Get a move on ya lazy wog fuckers.”

Most of this was good natured banter given in a friendly spirit, only a few really meant the words they spoke. With Dave and Jim turning towards the tent lines, hands filled with hot mugs and rolls, the head wallah began to return the remarks.

“You shut up down there you white bastard, or I not serve you tonight.”

Andy Dawson worked his way through 8 Platoon’s tents peering in each, in his search for a friendly face. The first tent held only one person, a thin ginger-headed youth, lying naked on a bed. In one hand he held a copy of a parade magazine, in his other his erect penis, masturbating.

The next tent was also occupied by only one person, he was crouched over a mess tin, half-filled with water; under the mess tin a hexamine cooker blazed away in a bluish flame. Within the steaming water squirmed a black and grey kitten, trying to scramble out. Andy watched for a moment the occupant of the tent frustrating its efforts, then he moved on. One tent up he found a crowd of seven or eight sitting on the beds and chairs.

“Hi Andy, come in and have a whet.”

As Dawson entered the tent he took the mug Sam Kyle offered him.

“Cheers Sam.”

“What you after Andy?” asked Billy Kennedy from a corner bed.

“Just thought I’d come up and find out the gen on what’s happening tomorrow. No one’s in 9 Platoon lines.”

“Yeah, they’re all away doing butt party for ‘B’ Company at Dhekelia Ranges. Those bunch of head cases should be back day after tomorrow.” This came from a short lad, with loose brown hair, who sat beside Kennedy.

Andy shrugged making a face, “So they’re head cases are they, well this Platoon’s got its share. Who’s that nutter next door trying to cook a kitten?”

“That bastard, is he at it again?”

A big broad shouldered youth with a Northern accent leapt from a chair to push past Dawson, accompanied by most of the members of the tent. As Jim Sinclair followed the Lancastrian into the tent, he found the kitten cooker being pushed away with one huge hand, while the panic stricken creature was snatched from the heated water with the other.

“Here Jim.” The pathetic, sodden animal was thrust into his chest.

“Now I told you what would happen if you tried that again.”

“I know, I know Mick I won’t do it again I promise.” The drunken voiced plea went unheeded.

Ten punches and as many kicks later, the kitten boiler lay on the cement floor, under a bed, out cold and bleeding.

CHAPTER 8

There is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Reg Berrill was awake when the Duty Bugler blew Reveille call, and had been for over an hour. He had spent most of the night in a restless state, turning from side to side, trying to find a position that would induce sleep. The strangeness of the bed, the chill of the small hours that quickly pierced through tent and blankets, and the howling of the dog packs that prowled the perimeter fence, all combined to minimize his slumber.

Muster Parade after breakfast was a leisurely affair compared to the depot; Corporals swept through the lines calling to members of individual platoons to get on parade. In a steady flow from the tents men ambled out onto the clear sloping ground just above the cook house, which was designated as 'C' Company's Muster Parade area.

Shortly two men appeared from the direction of the Sergeants' Mess, both dressed like the platoon junior ranks, in boots, PT shorts and beret. However, on their right wrists they wore a cloth strap showing Sergeant's insignias. One of these parted from the other making for 7 Platoon, while his partner kept on towards 8. This was Sergeant Anthony Knight. Thirty-two years old, of medium height, but well-built, with dark hair and eyes. His skin a rich tanned colour, was highlighted by the white of the note paper clipped to a mill board he carried.

Stopping to attention, in front of the now silent platoon, he began to speak. "Look in and let's have a good brace up." With that he quickly commanded the platoon to attention, then stood them at ease again. Reading from a list of names, he began to call the platoon roll.

At the end of his list he stopped, looking up to speak. "The three new men who arrived yesterday give me your names." Without looking at the owner, confirmed the names printed below his list, as a voice sounded from the ranks.

"Right," he cautioned, attaching his Biro to the mill board. "After the inspection by the Platoon Commander, we will go for a short run. Then we'll have a lecture on first aid by Corporal Finney the Company Medic. After NAAFI break, Mister Gilham will take you on section battle drills in the area of the water tower. And in the afternoon we

will all play volley ball."

With a short pause, as he stared into the ranks looking for a face he continued, "Even you Dutfield."

Dutfield, the masturbator of the night before, answered, "Yes Sir," but casting his eyes upwards with an unenthusiastic expression.

"You new lads, because you're not dressed for this run, I take it the rest of your kit is yet to arrive?" Which was true for they were standing in BD shirt sleeve order. "So while we are away I want you to report to the Company Arms Storeman, tell him I told you to see him about having a rifle allocated to you. Then draw it out, because when I return, I want to see you in your tents cleaning them, understood?"

Three voices from among the group of half-naked, sun-bronzed bodies, affirmed they did.

From a flank, a short, fair-haired man in his early twenties, came to a halt awaiting Knight to complete his briefing. On becoming aware of the other man, the Sergeant called the platoon to attention, then with a sharp about turn, marched towards the new man, who now also came to attention and began to march. At a comfortable distance both halted to exchange salutes, whereupon Knight reported the platoon present, and ready for inspection. The stranger was 8 Platoon's Commander, Lieutenant Barry Gilham.

Eight counted themselves lucky, for they were sure they had the best Platoon Commander and Sergeant in the battalion, and there were substantial grounds for this belief. For although lacking in height, Barry Gilham stood head and shoulders above his colleagues when it came to maturity and common sense. An ex-Royal Naval Officer, he had the qualities of being able to command and communicate with his men, which gained him their respect, something not readily given by Infantry soldiers.

If Lieutenant Gilham had the command of 8 Platoon he wisely accepted that Sergeant Knight ran it. With fifteen years' service in the Parachute Regiment, five of those as a senior NCO, he knew what was expected of a rifle Platoon Sergeant. Firm, but fair he kept everyone well in line, listening to the men, backing his Corporals, and expecting discipline to be maintained at all times.

The other side of the coin was 9 Platoon's command structure, at present they only had a Platoon Sergeant 'Blacky' Black — Black in name and black in nature. He was a bastard and loved it. His platoon despised him. But he didn't mind or perhaps he didn't even notice. The platoon had been expecting some relief shortly, for they were told a new Platoon Commander was arriving. But unfortunately this was to

be Second Lieutenant Roe and as we now know, he's a prick.

At mid-afternoon Dave, Billy and Reg were pulled off their beds by Lance Corporal Williams, to be told their kit had arrived off the ship, and was awaiting collection from the Colour Sergeant's Stores.

Sitting on the steps outside the Company Store was the big lad who had dealt out the barrack room justice to the cat cooker of the night before. This was Michael 'Armpit' Pridmore, one of the Company's Storemen. He was supervising the claiming of the baggage, because Colour Sergeant Ducker and the other Storemen, a Lance Corporal, were 'pads', married and living down the hill just outside the town in an estate of Army quarters, nicknamed, 'Peyton Place'.

'Armpit' found himself doing a lot of these afternoon assignments, for being single and living in the stores he had little choice. However, Ducker knew that if Pridmore wasn't on call to do these minor Company administration chores, then he would find himself making afternoon journeys back and forth to camp. Therefore he ensured 'Armpit' got his perks.

Pridmore's nickname was gained because of his secondary job, looking after the eleven pigs of the battalion's piggery. The idea of this was for 5 Para to rear its own pork, which once fattened would supplement the dining hall hot plate. Pridmore had taken the job to heart and kept the piggery and pigs clean, tidy and well-fed. Unfortunately his association with these honkers was, literally at times, cheek by jowl, hence his nickname.

The baggage had been dumped at the foot of the steps, where all six new comers arrived in ones and twos to collect their suitcases and kit bags. Dave Urwin reported to Pridmore that his suitcase was missing. 'Armpit' stood up twirling a ring of keys on his finger.

"OK, I'll just lock-up then we'll take a walk over to 'A' and 'B' Company, maybe they got off-loaded there by mistake."

They found it outside 'B' Company Stores. This was Urwin's first encounter with kit lost through Army transit, it was not to be his last.

Dave and Reg were sharing their tent with Bob MacIntyre and Ken Whyte, the two men who had passed through Abingdon with P Company, on the same parachute course as them. MacIntyre and Whyte being Infantry, had been posted to 5 Para six weeks earlier and were at present semi-detached from the Company.

Each Platoon in the battalion, had to provide two men as labourers, to help the 'crap hat' Pioneer detachment in the construction of the new Twynham billets, that were gradually replacing the tents. So

instead of training with the platoon, they would spend their time mixing and pouring cement, or erecting the frames, securing the bright metal roofs and walls to the 'shiny Twynys'.

Just before tea 9 Platoon returned from Dhekelia Ranges. Their three tonner stopped only briefly at the guard room to deposit two of its members into close arrest. 'Blacky' Black had let the platoon off into the garrison NAAFI the night before, where all returned on time except two, a few minutes late, who Blacky decided were drunk. Having consumed several bottles of Keo beer himself, his judgement was questioned by the two late-comers. To those who knew Sergeant Black this was the shortest possible way to misfortune.

The next morning Black marched them in on OC 'B' Company's orders. Major Brooks, because he was detached from the battalion, had been given the power to sentence men to jail if he so wished. So aided by a list of lies given in evidence by Sergeant Black, the two soldiers were duly whisked away for seven days.

As the lorry pulled up on 'C' Company's Muster Parade, to de-bus 9 Platoon, Second Lieutenant Roe walked down from the office where he had been waiting. For two long minutes he remained patiently watching the dark, slightly stooped, heavy set Sergeant, whose face wore a constant scowl, emptying the truck with gruff voiced threats and demands. Finally the Lieutenant made his presence known.

"Sergeant Black, it is Sergeant Black isn't it?" enquired Roe in his best public school accent.

Blacky turned pretending he had just become aware of the Officer.

"Yes that's right Sir," he replied, also pretending he had just noticed his rank, and acknowledged this with a sharp, but cold salute. Roe returned this, stepping forward to extend his hand.

"I'm Lieutenant Roe, I've only just arrived, and have been appointed your Platoon Commander."

Black grasped the soft pink hand in his large, tanned, dirty finger-nailed own. For some minutes they stood and sparred words, Roe asking questions, Black answering, each trying to measure the other. At the end of the conversation both men shared the same conclusion of the other, one which they had each started with, that 'this bastard is going to do only what I tell him to.' Before separating, Roe told Black that he would introduce himself to the Platoon on Muster Parade the next morning, after which he would take them on a run.

Blacky with the whiplash instinct of a weasel, smelled a rat, and immediately got his excuse in, "That's fine Sir, but the Corporals will

have to show you the route we use. Straight after Muster Parade I have to see the Colour Sergeant about the platoon's deficiencies. It's a pretty big list and weeks overdue."

The Lieutenant consented, but with suspicion, returning a weak salute as they parted, each for his own Mess.

The next morning Black's intuition proved right, 9 Platoon found themselves not only running the three miles of the Company set course, but also an extra two that Roe added on. The one thing he could do well, was run, and this he inflicted upon the platoon in order to impress and dominate. The men hoping the new boss would turn out to be a 'good'n', tried their best to stay with him, but most burned themselves up, having to drop back to make the best speed they could.

Andy Dawson didn't even attempt to, when he saw Roe hare away, stringing the platoon behind him; he changed down to first gear and stayed there. 9 Platoon arrived back on the Company muster area in groups of three, two or less, some trotting, some walking, all whacked.

Before being dismissed they were given a childish speech from their new Platoon Officer, on how he was going to turn his platoon into the fittest one in the battalion, and that he expected everyone to be able to stay up with him from now on, or he would have the stragglers charged. Andy Dawson and the rest of the platoon were now in no doubt, Second Lieutenant Nigel Roe, Surrey Schoolboy Cross Country Champion, Home Counties' Junior Bronze Medallist and Army South East District runner up, really was a prick.

That Friday evening most of the Battalion stayed in camp, the reason for this, the Saturday morning inspection and parade. On this weekly occasion tents were expected to be spotlessly clean and the contents, including the men, immaculately tidy.

Regimental Saturday mornings had traditionally been one of spit, polish and parades, only just recently it was decided that this time period could be put to better use. So after the New Year, this event would cease, to be replaced by more productive training. However, this too would only carry on for another few years, until it was realized that soldiers responded happily, and more efficiently, in doing a week's work, when they knew there were two full free days awaiting them at the weekend.

There was no Muster Parade on Saturday mornings, instead each Company Commander would inspect his Company lines, and all accommodation and men within. On the soldier's bed would be the normal, but perfectly made bed block, while laid on the bed itself was a rifle sling, a web belt and bayonet frog all freshly 'Blanco'-ed, with

brasses gleaming, plus the man's best boots highly bulled with studs shined and correctly in place. If the OC picked anyone up for a bad turnout this was an automatic 'show clean' for that night which meant his Saturday evening was forfeited.

Passing inspection by the OC and the small band that accompanied him was trial enough, but the Commanding Officer from time to time announced he would inspect a certain Company. Once this was known it would spark off furious activities of brushing, pressing, cleaning and polishing. For the fear was not of who was coming, but of those he brought with him. As well as the Company Commander and his CSM, trailing through every tent poking, prodding and prying, would be the QM, the Adjutant and most frightening of all the RSM.

The battalion marched onto the large asphalt square across the road from the guard room. Four Companies, the three rifle and support made up the parade, all HQ elements having been farmed out to the other four, prior to marching out of their lines.

Each man dressed in his best KD uniform, with gleaming boots and brasses, the senior NCOs and Warrant Officers positioned on their Company's flanks, distinctive with red sashes angling across bodies from shoulder to hip. Once the Companies had been halted in line at the top of the square, they were left, turned to face inwards, and stood at ease. From this point the Battalion Regimental Sergeant Major took control.

Like all good RSMs, Arthur Warr stood ramrod straight, his pace stick gripped correctly and level under the left arm, his Sam Brown belt gleaming in the morning sun, as he faced the assembled 5th Battalion the Parachute Regiment.

As his erect head scanned from one end of the ranks to the other, a clear unraised voice addressed everyone on parade. "You will be pleased I have no doubt, to learn this is the last time we will be having these Saturday morning get-togethers. I shouldn't think this will bring tears from any of you, but as it is the last I expect it to be the best, so let's have no, 'as you weres' this morning."

With that he took a deep breath in preparation for the cautionary word of command, that would bring the whole parade to attention. Facing directly to his front a single drawn-out word boomed towards the ranks, but some of the men had committed the cardinal mistake of not watching out for it and bracing up sharply.

"BAT-TALLIONASYOUWERE! Get a move on your idle bodies, this parade should last just under an hour, but by God if you people don't get a grip I'll have you here till tea time."

Then adjusting his pace stick he passed a final comment, loud enough for the battalion to hear but directed at the world in general. “No wonder we’re not bloody Royal.”

Laying the blame for being just plain old Parachute Regiment, squarely on the shoulders of this shower to his front.

When the RSM finished his bit, the Adjutant took over, inviting the Officers to march on. Once they had taken up their appointed position with swords drawn, the CO took command of the parade, from a maroon and blue painted portable saluting stand to the front of the square.

“The Battalion will march past in slow and quick time. Battalion right turn.”

On the CO’s further words of command, the whole formation then began to slow march around the square in three ranks, by Companies — ‘A’ Company leading. As the men stepped off, the battalion band and drums, who had been waiting to the rear of the parade, struck up a march. After making a left wheel the Companies slow paced their way towards the top of the square. As the leaders came up to its edge, each Company Commander in turn gave the order to left turn and as one they pivoted on the spot, causing the whole formation to change direction 90 degrees, so they were no longer marching in lines but now as a wave topped by a crest of maroon berets, three ranks deep.

Just before the saluting base the ranks opening out three paces between each, gave an eyes right in salute to the Commanding Officer, then closed up their ranks once again, marching on to left wheel, as they again came to the edge of the asphalt. Once Support Company passed the saluting base the band stopped playing, except the big bass drum that continued to beat out the time.

On the CO’s sharp command, the battalion broke into quick time. With that order the stiff wooden-legged movements of the slow march ceased, allowing the parade to step off smartly, metal heels crunching the solid surface of the square, right arms gripping their rifles, pulling them into the sides of bodies, left arms swinging upwards shoulder high, everyone pleased to be released from the restricting slow march, and on the move looking more as a soldier should.

With ‘A’ Company, advancing once again past the saluting base, the band began to play the Regimental March, The Ride of the Valkyries’. On recognizing the music, heads raised with necks stiffening, forcing themselves back in collars, while elbows straightened, thumbs pressing down that little bit harder on clenched fingers. The Regimental March was one of those tunes that had the magical power

of making men grow that extra inch.

This was the first time Dave Urwin had seen the battalion gathered together as one group. Seven hundred strangers sweeping around the parade square in a dozen disciplined, evenly spaced lines. Unknown to him, in less than a year he would be familiar with the first name of every one.

On returning to their tents the men found there was only enough of the morning left to change out of their best kit and have a cigarette or a shower before it was lunch. Saturday lunch was the start of the weekend, with this over the men could concentrate on whatever had been planned during the last five days.

With the emergency now over and terrorist activities no longer a threat to the service men, he could, if so desired, journey to any part of the island. For most though this was not possible, transportation and time had the average soldier restricted to his local base area.

In the case of 5 Para this meant Limassol. That however, was not a drawback for it provided bars, night clubs and whore houses which for most was all the entertainment your common-or-garden Paratrooper was interested in. A newly arrived serviceman if he was not prepared to open his eyes and question the fact, could very easily be brainwashed by the old hands who condemned the posting and people as a tip lived in by wogs. They were the ones who were forever muttering, the sooner we get back to good old blighty the better.

In reality Cyprus was a paradise, a beauty spot of sun and sea blessed by weather that minimized cloud, rain and cold. During the summer it was hot, but never unbearably so. Even in the winter months it was possible to swim from the beaches in the morning, then making the two hour drive up into the Troodos Mountains, to spend the afternoon skiing on the snowy pine slopes of Mount Olympus.

For those who were prepared to make the effort, a slice of happy adventurous life could be had while on this island. But before Dawson and the other white-skinned new arrivals could begin turning their bodies a more acceptable brown, the Army presented them with a gift, an eight day Christmas holiday.

It started Christmas Eve and finished at morning Muster Parade on the 2nd January. In between, the men were awoken on Christmas morning with the traditional gun fire, the serving in bed by the Officers and SNCOs of tea, well laced with rum. They were also expected to serve the soldiers their Yuletide lunch in the cook house. This was given the air of a formal occasion with everyone dressed in KD uniform.

Each Company sat at their own tables which were stocked out with nuts, fruit, condiments and a can of beer per person. With the band seated in one corner playing carols, and the plates of turkey being handed around by Majors, Captains, Sergeant Majors and Sergeants, the atmosphere was boisterous and good-natured.

However, at the end of the CO's speech in which he wished everyone the usual things for this time of year, Sam Kyle leaned across to Reg Berrill to say, "Reg when the shit starts flying, watch your head because I'm coming over this table, and going straight out that open window behind you."

Reg who had been smiling at the Colonel's closing joke continued to smile saying, "Huh?" in reply.

Before Sam could repeat his warning, a single walnut sailed out of the Support Company tables to land on the head of a man at 'B' Company's. In reply three nuts were returned, back came ten more and an orange. That was it, within seconds the whole room was like a chimpanzee's tea party. Clouds of nuts, fruit and beer cans were flying throughout the dining hall.

Reg was only just aware of the figure of Sam Kyle stepping onto the table to do a header over the top of him out the window. It was all great fun until the soft missiles ran out, then the hard stuff began to fly. 9 Platoon from the start threw everything they could get their hands on at Sergeant Black who bulled his way out the main door at the first opportunity, followed by plates, cans and spice shakers.

Reg and Dave Urwin stood laughing and enjoying the stampede that was now occurring towards all exits. Reg stopped his laughing when a plastic sauce bottle glanced off the side of his head, sending him tumbling into Dave. They both quickly scrambled under the table for shelter with Reg holding his head to find his fingers going sticky.

"I'm bleeding Davy, I'm bleeding," he informed Urwin urgently.

"No you're not," came a voice beside him. "It's just brown sauce."

It was 'Armpit' Pridmore who sat cross-legged spooning the last of his turkey dinner from a plate.

Billy Kennedy and Sam Kyle watched the entrance door as food and people spilled through, Sam grinning, Billy puzzled. Kennedy not knowing why, had followed Sam out the window, judging that whatever Sam did was bound to be the right thing for him. As they watched, the CO trotted out the door head tucked down, a pipe gripped tight between clenched teeth.

As he slowed to a walk, he took the pipe from his mouth to

straighten up. On passing, he turned with a smile and a wink saying, “It gets better every year doesn’t it Kyle.” Sam acknowledged this also with a smile and a respectful, “It seems that way Sir.”

“You mean this happens every year?” asked Billy in a semi-annoyed tone.

“That’s right,” smiled back Kyle.

“So I’m never gonna get my Christmas pud then?” chafed the Londoner.

Once everyone had time to change and clean up, a large percentage of the men returned to the cook house to help in tidying the mess.

A cold February north wind blew down from Turkey and over the Kyrenia Mountains to gust across ‘A’ Company’s parachute dropping zone, which was nothing more than a large piece of crop free ground thirty miles east of Limassol. Although broad and flat it wasn’t really the best of drop zones, the soil for landing was soft enough, but the bed rock only a few inches below the surface was in many places bared.

Also scattered about protruding from the reddish earth and clumps of leafy ground hugging vines were boulders, the size of footballs and larger. A sporting DZ was what the OC ‘A’ Company called it when he chose the location.

He, Major John Winstanley was agitated and showed it. For the last seventy minutes he had been waiting for ‘P’, parachute hour to arrive. But during that time, it was becoming apparent the light breeze that was blowing when he first arrived, was now increasing beyond the acceptable safety limit.

With only twenty minutes to go before the Company would be flying over the DZ, he impatiently enquired of the RAF Officer, whose job it was to supervise the laying out of the DZ, what the wind speed was.

The Flight Lieutenant pushed a hand held wind anemometer up just above his eye level, to hold it there for some seconds watching the small, air catching cups spin around, and the climb of the red needle on the speed reading just below them. “It’s not too hopeful Sir, gusting over twenty knots and increasing,” came the answer.

Winstanley didn’t acknowledge, as he anxiously glanced at his watch, then pushing his hands into the lower pockets of his smock, staring towards the horizon in the direction of the aircraft’s intended approach. ‘This bloody wind,’ he thought to himself, ‘it’s going to

upset my whole exercise.' Which was true, Winstanley had planned his little training scheme as a short but fast moving exercise.

Once the men were on the deck a section of the RAF Regiment, off to one side of the DZ, would open fire causing the parachutists to mount an attack the moment they had freed themselves of their parachute harnesses. Once this had been dealt with the Company would reorganize and begin the second phase, which was an advance to contact followed by a Company assault on a platoon-size enemy positioned five miles away.

This would be followed by a night march until dawn, with platoon and section skirmishes throughout the rest of the day. The final phase was to be a night approach march ending with a dawn attack on another enemy position. It would be a fast, tiring thirty-six hours, and Winstanley had meant it to be, for he was not involved; instead, his job would be directing the enemy and umpiring events. The second-in-Command Captain Redman would be in charge of the Company for this exercise.

"I think you had better put a red cartridge in that pistol." Winstanley looked back over his shoulder at the RAF Officer who had just spoken.

"What was that you said?" he asked in a brusque indignant voice.

"I was just telling your driver Sir, he can get ready to send up a red flare, I just had a gust of almost 25 knots."

Winstanley refusing to accept reality and angry that someone had actually tried to pre-empt his decision, snapped his reply back, "I'll decide whether or not this jump is off."

Then fixing heated eyes on his driver he reversed the last order, "Dwyer put a green in the pistol and await my orders."

The Flight Lieutenant realizing the Major was not accepting the danger of the high wind conditions decided he had better press the case.

"Sir although we have lulls within the limit, they are short and growing shorter. Every minute the wind is gusting longer and harder."

"I'm aware of this and I'll decide whether to parachute or cancel nearer the drop time." Winstanley replied without taking his eyes off the horizon.

Dwyer had a quick look at his watch, it was 3.20, 'P' hour would be in ten minutes and he knew exactly what his OC would do. With his thumb he pushed a green cartridge into

the chamber of the signal pistol, snapping the breech closed.

Winstanley lifted his head slightly, even appearing to be happy as he warned the whole DZ party clustered around the large red panel marker.

“Here they come.”

Pointing to three Hastings aircraft five miles out, flying astern of each other at eight hundred feet. The RAF Officer who could only recommend the jump be cancelled, now continually held the anemometer up watching the speed gauge.

“Sixteen … eighteen knots,” replied the RAF Officer, not taking his eyes off the needle.

Winstanley half-smiled believing this to be well acceptable. With the aeroplanes a mile from the DZ a strong gust of wind swept across it, kicking up small dust clouds from patches of bare soil.

“Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four … .” called out the Lieutenant, his eyes glued to the gauge.

“Here let me see that,” demanded the OC snatching the instrument, then holding it up so only he could read it. After a few seconds he muttered to himself.

“Yes that’s better.” Then turning to his driver ordered, “Dwyer put that flare up, now.”

“Yes Sir,” responded the soldier, fatefully pointing the pistol into the air and squeezing the trigger.

Eight Platoon sat in a three tonner at the far end of the DZ, sheltering from the sharpness of the wind and the definite drop in temperature it caused. Their reason for being there was to provide the DZ clearance party, this entailed sweeping across the drop zone after ‘A’ Company had left, collecting all the discarded parachutes and weapon container equipment. The platoon was in a happy mood, for with the rising wind the chance of ‘A’ Company parachuting looked to be nil. This would mean no task for them, followed by a quick motor back to Limassol in time for tea and an unexpected night off.

When the aeroplanes came into view on their approach run not many of the platoon took much notice, for all they would do was over-fly the drop zone, then return to RAF Nicosia Airfield, to disembark the undropped men, whereupon they would journey out to the DZ by road, arriving later that night. This was why their OC was so upset at this irritating wind; it nearly caused him to lose time and have to modify his exercise.

As the first aircraft came level with the lorry, Billy Kennedy and Dave Urwin were stood on the tail board watching the open port door and the miniature airborne figure standing in it waiting for the green light, which would signal him into the air.

“Well he’s not going to feel any slipstream up his ass today,” commented Urwin.

“Too bloody true,” agreed Kennedy holding his beret to his head as a sudden rush of wind almost flipped it away.

Sergeant Knight, who was sat in the passenger seat of the three tonner cab beside the driver, heard the aircraft approaching, and was now studying the ground in the direction of the DZ party at the Alpha marker half a mile away.

The ground dipped from him there concealing everyone, so he was watching carefully in order not to miss the inevitable red signal flare meant to warn the RAF pilot and navigator that the jump was scrubbed. This would also tell him that he and his platoon were no longer required, and that they could make tracks back to camp. Suddenly not a red, but a small green firey ball arced up out of the surface of the ground. Even before the flare reached its highest point the wind had carried it well off its trajectory.

Knight jerked forward staring unbelieving through the windscreen.

“What the bloody hell are they playing at?”

Not waiting for the driver to reply to his shouted demand, he threw his door open, leaping to the ground. In amazement Urwin and Kennedy watched as the first aircraft began to spew its cargo into the sky.

“Fuck me they’re jumping,” shouted Billy into the half-light of the canvas enclosed lorry.

“Never!”

“Bollocks!”

“Fuck off Kennedy!”

Came back replies as men began pushing up onto the tail board, half-expecting it to be another of Kennedy’s jokes.

Sergeant Knight suddenly appeared below them shouting at the top of his voice.

“All of you off, off now.”

“Get down wind and collapse those lads’ canopies, come on move

yourselves."

Then knowing what the danger to the parachutist was, set off at a sprint after the men in the air, hoping his platoon were also following at the double.

Once the parachutes had fully opened the upstairs wind, even stronger than that on the ground, began to carry canopies and men off the boundary of the drop zone. The first aircraft had no chance of assistance from 8 Platoon, they were crashing, bouncing and being dragged across the ground long before Sergeant Knight and his party reached their point of impact. Even the second chalk only had a few men with them, in time to catch the odd careering chute as it dragged its helpless paratrooper across the bumpy ground.

By the time the bulk of 8 Platoon had arrived in the area, most of the first two chalks had halted their dragging and somehow collapsed the canopy, to scramble out of the harness, hurrying to the aid of others. As the last aircraft load raced down wind, hanging helpless under nylon sails, the men of 8 Platoon scattered, trying to pick out a man who would land nearby that he could help. Sam Kyle knew what the trick was.

As someone landed up wind of him he began to run down wind, when the inflated canopy shot past he grabbed for the rigging lines, then dug his heels in and pulled the chute down, allowing the air to rush out the far side. This caused the collapsing nylon to flop in a shallow heap on the deck.

For most though the first attempt was hit or miss, as few had ever dealt with canopies dragging men in winds this high. The DZ, once the men were down, looked like a mini regatta with clouds of nylon racing across the ground, a figure unable to free himself from the harness bouncing behind it.

Dave Urwin positioned himself in front of an oncoming chute, only to find himself knocked over by the solid inflated nylon wall. However, he did achieve his aim by becoming tangled in the lower rigging lines, which caused it to collapse.

Billy Kennedy leapt on a man as he was being dragged past, hoping to stop him with his added weight, but only managed to become a passenger. Looking up at Billy from the position of being dragged on his back, the parachutist suggested, "Well don't just lie there funny bastard, reach up and pull in the rigging lines."

Reg Berrill tried a similar variation, too late to, jump on the man, he instead made a flying tackle at the weapon container following behind, attached to the man's harness by its suspension rope. Reg now

also found himself having a free ride, but this one was rough. One second he was on it, then it was on him, having his ears almost ripped off every time they came in contact with the ground. Finally the journey ended by the parachutist wedging himself into a small fold in the ground. Reg dizzily climbed to his feet to catch the edge of the parachute, dragging it to one side.

The drop as a military exercise turned into a farce. The RAF section dutifully fired away with blank ammunition, trying to coax an attacking response from the Paras, but they weren't playing any more, there were just too many casualties that had to be cared for.

Medics from the DZ party began to arrive, then shortly a sand-coloured ambulance with large red crosses, also picked its way slowly across the broken ground. At first Sergeant Knight thought half the Company would be dead, but as individuals began to recover from the shock it soon looked much better.

No one was killed, but two were still unconscious, a third had been dragged into a large boulder which caught him in the spine, he couldn't move his legs and never would, he was now condemned to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Two others had compound fractures of the leg, and one a dislocated shoulder. Others were concussed. Jim Sinclair stopped a man who was walking about dazed, decided to sit him down, when it was discovered he couldn't remember his name or what he was doing there.

But now there was more drama to come. Ten minutes after the troops had landed, two other aircraft appeared, also on jump runs, this was the heavy drop. The two planes were Beverleys with the rear clam-shell doors removed, this to allow the heavy drop platforms a clear exit as they rolled off the sill of the tail gate. The heavy drop DZ was to the north of the personnel, to ensure no one was crushed by the platforms as they landed.

Even with the roar of the engines few bothered to watch, as a drogue chute inflated from the back of each Beverley. As these filled with air they anchored themselves behind the aircraft, providing a force that pulled the platforms out of the cargo bays and into the air. When the first dropped away, a second from each bay quickly followed whereupon three huge parachutes streamed, then slowly deployed above each load.

Below the canopies and on these large platforms were shackled Land Rovers, mainly for Support Company sections attached to the Company. Two were anti-tank wagons carrying 106 mm recoiless guns, one for the 3 inch mortar detachment and 'A' Company stores

and re-supply vehicle. Although they weighed a lot more than a man, they also had a lot more parachute volume, which if anything caused them to travel even faster and further across the sky.

As these giant white nylon cargo carriers sailed rapidly over their own DZ bulleting towards the unused personnel one, people on the ground became conscious of their arrival and began to watch. The first to land didn't, it crashed sideways on, tipping over showing its under belly to the horizon. The parachutes' automatic release disengaged the canopies from the platforms, allowing them to float majestically away on the wind.

Normally they would crumple to the deck, but today they retained their inflation for some time before spreading themselves across the ground. Even then little nylon channels would trap a gust of air, which would balloon up threatening to fully inflate and again soar further on.

The second platform hurtled down wind to smash nose first into the deck. This shock broke loose the gun mounted Land Rover from its shackles, driving the vehicle off the platform and into the rocky soil. The third ended up on its back, but it was the last one that caused the men on the ground some anxious moments.

As it struck the ground side on, the whole load flipped to spin half a turn in the air before striking the deck again. Whether this triggered the malfunction or not, was not clear, but whatever it was the canopy release failed to operate. For a second the tumbled vehicle and platform lay still, then as the three parachutes leaned with the wind taking up the strain, both they and the platform began to move across the deck.

Sergeant Knight was the first to see what was about to happen and began to shout a warning. Others realizing they were in the path of this monster, began to bomb-burst out of its way. Jim Sinclair grabbed his concussed victim by the shoulder of his smock, then dragging him to his feet ran him off to one side. Sam Kyle helped a medic to carry a Corporal suffering a fractured thigh for fifty metres, while all the time screaming in Sam's ear from the pain of his rough handling.

Luckily a channel was cleared, for as this rogue cargo ploughed its way, rolling and tumbling through what should have been an orderly, well-disciplined parachute DZ, everyone could see that anything in its path would have been crushed. The parachutes and platform continued on for another thousand metres until the load caught up on a wire fence, where the parachutes still remained inflated straining at its load until the late evening, when the wind died.

Two hours after the first man had stepped out of the aircraft, 'A' Company finally pushed off to begin their exercise. Behind them they left one man crippled, six with broken limbs and five others with assorted injuries. Many of those that did go were limping or keeping quiet about the pain that radiated from knocks they had received. For as big a cold-blooded bastard as Winstanley was, his men accepted him for it, and would rather be struck dead than give up on anything he dished out.

Eight Platoon who expected to be back in camp for tea that evening, were still on the DZ clearing up bits and pieces that same time the following evening.

On returning to camp, Sam Kyle found a well-travelled letter, with a month old postmark waiting for him. The original address was in his wife's handwriting which read:

Pte. S. Kyle, Parachute Regiment, Aldershot, Hants.

Scrawled around that were three other addresses, put there by orderly room clerks trying to catch him at the Depot, Abingdon, and finally 5 Para BFPO 53, which was the forces' postal code for Cyprus.

Peeling back the envelope Sam felt a mixture of joy and depression. Joy because shortly he would be reading words his wife had written, and depression because he had spent the last six months trying to shut her out of his thoughts. Sam sat on his bed, hunching forward to catch the light from the bare electric bulb, that hung from the centre of the tent.

Dear Sam, the letter began.

I'm sorry for having to write you, but there has occurred a change of events. My father has decided to move in with his latest woman, so Mum knows all about him. She has been broken-hearted for the last weeks, and although he has told her she can have the house she won't have that, and is making plans to join her sister in Australia. Which brings me to why I'm writing. When Mum leaves Suzanne and I will be moving into a flat … Sam didn't read any further, with the letter still clutched in his hand, he rushed up the Company lines to another tent.

"Where's Dougie?" he asked of a man sat at a table reading.

"Having a shower Sam, why?" came the reply. But Sam without responding hurried towards the showers.

"Dougie do you know where Knight lives?"

Sam stood in the entrance to the large shower room, putting the question to a short thin youth with sandy-brown hair, who was busy

soaping his naked body. Dougie stepped out from under a thin stream of warm water, that was causing a fog to rise from the cool evening air, that freely. entered through large open gaps between the wall and the roof.

“Sure Sam, it’s down in Peyton Place, I’ve had to take some stuff down to him from Gilham, a couple of times.”

“How do I get there?” asked Kyle.

“Hard to explain and I can’t remember the number,” replied Abbot, cupping his hands under the flow of water. “Why what’s the problem?”

“Need to see him to get some questions answered,” said Sam impatiently.

“I’m going down the town in a bit, if you want a walk I’ll show you how to get to his quarter.”

“Champion,” beamed Kyle. “When you going?”

“Give me half an hour, I’ll see you at the Company office.”

“Make it fifteen minutes, it’s important and I’m in a hurry,” called back Sam disappearing out the door.

“Screw the nut Sam, I got to press a pair of trousers,” pleaded Abbot, stepping back under the water.

Dougie Abbot was the Platoon Commander’s batman, a job normally looked upon with distaste, but not in 8 Platoon. Lieutenant Gilham asked only what was expected, that Abbot clean and polish his kit when it needed to be, and that he was on hand to carry out the odd errands from time to time. In the field on exercises, Abbot then became the Platoon runner, whose task it was to pass verbal messages, act as the Platoon Commander’s body guard, and to, at times cook his scoff.

This could be an unhappy partnership, for there were some Officers who treated their batmen as flunkies. This wasn’t the case in 8 Platoon, Gilham was a mature, level-headed officer and Abbot a dedicated soldier, neither would allow discord or misunderstanding to upset their association.

Kyle rang the bell of the semi-detached bungalow which was just one of the many set in a well-lighted estate. The door was answered by a slim, attractive, dark-haired woman in her early thirties.

“Mrs Knight?” asked Sam a bit hesitant, not sure he really had the right house.

“Yes, that’s right,” came the cheerful reply.

Kyle explained he wished to speak to her husband, whereupon he was invited in. Mrs Knight shouted down the hallway that her husband had a visitor. Tony Knight, then appeared through a side living room door, to greet Kyle highly informally.

“Hello Sam, what you want me for, has the camp burnt down?”

“No Sarge, I’m just after some gen.”

“Well let’s go into the kitchen, the kids are in there fighting over a Monopoly board.” Excused Knight swinging an arm back into the doorway, before turning down the hall.

Although Tony Knight was a firm believer in not fraternizing with the junior ranks, within his own home and with a man he knew would not take advantage of it, he was prepared to relax his principles; besides, Kyle was too old a friend for him to enforce the Sergeant-Private relationship when they were alone and off parade.

Both men had been Privates together during the battalion’s three year tour of Egypt, four months of which they spent in close arrest behind barbed wire. This had come about one night when, through sheer frustration of the unending bull shit duties and guards they were constantly doing, some of the battalion rebelled, eighty or so took over the NAAFI, throwing the staff out, barricaded the doors and refused to come out even on the command of the Orderly Officer.

The next morning a Company of MPs broke in to find everyone unconscious from drink, having overnight consumed the entire bar stock. The CO had them marched into a wire compound and left there for four months. However, it wasn’t a rest camp for they became the battalion’s fatigue men, supplying the muscle for every hard or dirty job going. Theirs was the last laugh though, for under the title of The Compound Wanderers, they challenged and beat every football team in the Garrison.

Over a cup of tea Sam explained about he and his wife’s long separation and the reason for it. Then enquired of his Sergeant what the chances were of getting her out to Cyprus in married quarters.

“I don’t know,” replied Knight. “You’re cutting it fine, we’re due to return to blighty in seven months’ time, and a unit with six months or less to serve of its tour, are not allowed to accept accompanying wives and families.”

“So I haven’t much time to play with?” pondered Kyle.

“No Sam, but the best thing you can do is talk to your wife, and see

how she feels about coming out, in the first place," suggested Knight.

"Well I was going to get a letter off tonight, but I'm not too sure she'll be at her old address, it's been a month and she could've moved by now."

"Let's find out, is there a telephone at the house?" Knight's question caught Sam half out of step, he hadn't considered phoning.

"Yes, but I've forgotten the number."

"No problem, we'll ask directory enquiries, come on I'll drive you back into camp. My mate's BOS tonight, we'll see him about using the phone in the orderly room."

Sam stood in the Nicosia civil airport parking lot, watching as a British United Britannia taxied towards him. A hundred metres from the air terminal it stopped with a decreasing whine, as its propeller engines were switched off. When the doors opened, Sam stepped closer to the perimeter wire, positioning himself for a better view.

Kyle's appearance was one of an unconcerned observer, but within him were opposing emotions of anticipation and happiness. Now his heart also signalled its involvement by thumping that little bit harder, for at the top of the passenger ramp, his wife and daughter appeared from the darkened plane doorway, to stand slightly bewildered in the bright Cyprus sunshine. As they began to descend the steep steps, Beth shading her eyes and young Suzanne half-turning into her mother's legs to shield herself from the unaccustomed glare, Sam left the parking lot to hurry through the terminal entrance.

Only two weeks had elapsed since the night of the telephone call. Beth did hesitate, when Sam told her he would like them to come out to him, but finally agreed. The first step in getting his wife and child out, was for Knight to speak to Mr Gilham, Gilham spoke to Major Hanning and he explained the case to the Commanding Officer.

At Kyle's end, his job had been relatively simple that was the one of accommodation. This had been solved by Knight taking him to a Turkish estate agent, who fixed him up with a civilian house, which was taken on by the Army, as a hiring.

Beth was the one with the real problems, for she was confronted by the seemingly mammoth task of making arrangements to leave the country. This was overcome by a well-practiced organization known throughout the Army as the old boys' net.

With the intention of cutting all paper work to the bone, the CO of 5 Para, wired an old friend, the Commanding Officer of the 10th

Battalion, the Parachute Regiment which was a London based Territorial Battalion, asking if he could assist. Beth who up to that time had never seen a red beret before, suddenly found her life filled with them.

First a young TA Paratrooper who took the time off his work, to do so, arrived at her front door with a black Army Staff car. He, to begin with, drove her to the 10th Battalion HQ at White City, where the Adjutant explained to her, they would be handling most of the arrangements.

For the next week the TA soldier and Beth were in the car practically every day. First to Somerset House for passport information, then on three occasions down to Aldershot sorting out documentations with the depot chief clerk, and across to the Cambridge Hospital for her and Suzanne's travel jabs.

For all the help she had received from the Regiment, both TA and regular, the only payment Beth could give was a quick kiss on the cheek of the young TA driver, prior to boarding the plane at Heathrow that morning.

At the top of the Eastern escarpment Sam accelerated, then eased the clutch in, to put the car into top gear for the downhill journey. This car was Knight's loaned to him by his Platoon Sergeant for this one special occasion. Kyle refused his first offer, but Knight wouldn't take a no, threatening him with a week's jankers but in the same breath demanding he return the motor with a full tank of petrol.

"That's it, that's going to be home for a while," said Kyle pointing through the windscreen at Limassol off in the distance.

"Oh Sam it's beautiful I didn't expect the sea to be so close," exclaimed Beth, surprised by this lush green jewel after so much barren scrub.

"We're only twenty minutes' walk from the beach. If you like we can spend a day down there sometime this week," said Sam, then turning to Suzanne who sat on her mother's knee he asked, "How does that sound Suzanne, would you like your dad to teach you how to swim?"

Suzanne looked at him for a second, her blue eyes registering no response as she silently sank back on her mother's lap, to resume staring at the road ahead. Sam and Beth exchanged glances, both feeling a light sense of embarrassment. Suzanne's cold behaviour had begun at the airport and continued on the whole road journey. This was not unexpected for Kyle realized that his disappearance on that Sunday morning had been a great let down to her.

Sam stopped the car in the driveway of a recently built flat-roofed bungalow. Collecting the luggage from the boot, he led his family up onto the open porch and through the front door. Beth spent the next few minutes walking from room to room, then finally joining her husband who was making tea in the kitchen, asked, “Sam you’re still a Private aren’t you?”

“Yup, ‘fraid so love, why?”

“Well how can we afford this, it’s fantastic,” exclaimed Beth throwing her arms out to her side obviously impressed.

“This is the standard of the hiring out here,” explained Kyle, “and we don’t pay for it the Army does.”

“Oh Sam,” smiled Beth, stepping forward to hug her husband.

Sam was about to do a little more than hug his wife in return, when Suzanne rushed in.

“Mummy, Mummy we’ve got trees in our back garden.”

“That’s right Suzanne, orange trees we can pick oranges off them later in the year,” replied her father.

“Oranges Mummy, oranges.” Kyle watched his daughter smile for the first time that day.

Sam sat on the settee in the front room of his new home, listening to the Forces’ broadcasting station, transmitting over the wireless from Nicosia.

It had been a busy week for him, after taking over the house, his evenings had been spent preparing, arranging the rooms and stocking up on provisions. The platoon had helped, clearing and digging the garden and putting up a clothes’ line. They also added a few things to the house as well, like the radio which was loaned to him by Ken Whyte.

Even money, for without him asking, pound notes were forced into his hand. He would not be seeing any of his platoon for another week, for Charlie Company were up on Mount Olympus on a fortnight’s skiing. This fitted in nicely for him, for instead of having to go with them the OC had given Sam two weeks’ leave to settle his family in.

Beth entering the room sat in an easy chair across from him.

“She’s asleep now, off before her head touched the pillow.”

“She would, the journey must have taken a lot out of her,” replied Sam acknowledging his daughter’s early departure to her bed.

“Don’t take Suzanne’s attitude too seriously Sam, she’ll come around in a few days.”

Beth was commenting on the child’s reaction to his offer of carrying her to bed, which was a polite refusal, asking for her mother instead.

“You broke her heart you know Sam.” Kyle looked at his wife.

“She searched the house for you that Sunday morning, and when she couldn’t find you, she came into my bedroom and lay beside me crying her eyes out.” Sam shifted his gaze to the wall.

“I know honey, I owe her five years of my life.”

“You owe us both Sam.”

Kyle quickly looked at his wife expecting to see the anger he thought prompted her remark. But instead all he could detect was a faint wistful glazing of the eyes.

Beth lifted her face to the stream of warm water that flowed from the shower head. It had been a long tiring day, filled with anxiety, surprise and joy, and now she relaxed her body allowing the water to mellow her memories of the past hours. Her escape away from the present was disturbed by the rustling of the shower curtain.

“Come on you, there’s a queue out here.”

“Go away Sam this water is too nice to leave yet.” The reply was made with a laugh, but Beth meant it.

“That stuffs not free you know, the Army doesn’t pay for that, I do. So come on I want my share,” pressed Sam again shaking the curtain, but also laughing.

Beth realizing Sam wasn’t to be put off, filled one palm from the stream of shower water and threw it over the curtain hoping to discourage her husband for a few more minutes. Sam jumped back with threats of forcible entry to eject his wife. Beth for her part ignored the challenge and again threw water out of the shower. Sam with a playful howl, warned her that that was it and he was about to kick her out from under the water, while trying to pull the curtain back.

Beth again laughing struggled to hold it in place, but finding it hopeless, fell back against the shower wall. As the curtain was pushed aside by her grinning husband, she reached up to turn the shower head and its gush of water towards Sam. He took the spray from face to chest causing him to jump back in surprise. Beth giggling with joy

to see the look on her husband's face, now held her own face to her hands, as she again laughed. Sam laughed too for another second, then gradually becoming aware that this lovely damp creature with the milk white skin, and blonde hair, hanging so straight and wet to her shoulders, was the wife he had not made love to for over five years.

Slowly his smile disappeared to be replaced by an expression of admiration and longing. Beth continued to laugh, not yet recognizing the change that had come over her husband, until he pulled the towel from his waist allowing it to drop to the floor. She watched silently, now no longer smiling but standing erect, arms at her side as Sam's bronze frame approached.

On entering the shower cubicle, his hands felt their way around her shoulders and back, pulling her into his quickly dampening body. His lips began to journey across the sweet ridges of her face, while his voice kept uttering just one word over and over, "Beth … Beth … ."

Beth reached with her hands to hold his face still, silencing the voice with her lips on his. They stayed that way allowing the shower to run freely over each for some minutes. Finally Sam separated their lips, bending his head, to begin running his tongue over her neck and shoulders. As his lips reached her breast, Beth closed her eyes.

Gripping Sam's shoulders while he covered the creamy mounds with little kisses, that were heightened by the mild heat of the water, washing downward over her tingling flesh. When Sam placed his mouth over one nipple, his wife's back arched, forcing her hips into his.

Their stay in the shower then ended, with Kyle picking his wife up, to carry her into the bedroom, where they made love to each other, as the warm evening Cyprus air, drifted in through the half-opened windows.

CHAPTER 9

Father, I cannot tell a lie,

I did it with my little hatchet.

George Washington

Paddy Kieran stopped chipping with his pick at the ice covering the tarmac road to straighten, then observing his work commented aloud, “Flaming Jesus.” Now turning to the other five members of his work party to continue, “Dis job will have us here till the bloody spring.”

Billy Kennedy leaned on his shovel, also surveying their project and agreed, punctuating his assurance with the liberal use of four lettered words.

‘C’ Company had been on Mount Olympus for five wonderful days, days of bright cold sunshine, skiing on brighter, but colder brilliantly white snow. Today though, cloud was hovering in a thick fog limiting visibility and causing the ski runs to be closed. This of course restricted the snow frolicking of the Company, confining most to the large wooden billets, where they read or played cards, awaiting a change in the weather.

For others however, their day was pre-deemed by destiny. On his way to breakfast that morning Sergeant ‘Tuck’ Friar, Platoon Sergeant of 7 Platoon had slipped on the icy road, badly spraining his ankle. This had triggered off Company Sergeant Major Vallis, who decided to put a fatigue party to work on the frozen snow-packed roads about the Company area. The fact that the job was one of immense proportion or that Sergeant Friar was a great clumsy baboon didn’t enter his head, and so two men from each Platoon set to work with the most inadequate of tools, the Infantry short-handled entrenching pick and shovel.

For an hour the six men had chipped and scraped trying to make some sort of start to the job. But it soon became apparent that sixty men wouldn’t have done much more, for this ice was firmly cemented to the asphalt.

It was Scouse Holgarth who gave Kennedy the idea when he remarked, “Fucking stuff ain’t gonna shift until it fucking thaws.”

Billy agreed nodding his head, then with a smile appearing on his face, he suddenly realized what would shorten their detail for them.

With the help of Reg Berrill, he stole four jerry cans of petrol from the cache, that the Colour Sergeant kept behind his stores, to pour over the sloping hard-packed roadway. To see the job right, Paddy Kieran also nicked, and added a further two cans, to the solid snowy surface.

As the others stood back, Scouse Holgarth struck a match, setting the petrol alight. Quickly, fire travelled the hundred feet of petroleum treated road, crackling in a yellowish blue smokeless flame. Within seconds the heat began to melt the packed snow and ice, but just as the group of smiling faces were about to congratulate each other, things turned wrong.

In puzzled amazement they stared as the melted surface of the road began to move down its slope, taking the flaming petrol with it. As it moved the warm water caused the melting of that part of the road, and so downhill it travelled, gathering momentum like a fiery avalanche.

The volume was staggering; when it reached the sharp turn above the Officers' and Sergeants' accommodation, the flow was three inches high. At this bend, was a small basin, with the snow pushed up from its edges three feet or so. Here a pool was quickly formed, the only outlet being the steps down to the Officers' and Sergeants' billets. Down these the fiery water tumbled, to again form another pool on the wooden porch.

Unable to seep away to the sides because of the four foot high banks of cleared snow, the flaming tide crept upwards to the doorsill. At that moment the upper pool broke its snow dyke, letting loose a three foot wall of water which rapidly flooded the lower pool, causing this great pressure of water to test its new confines seeking an exit. This proved to be the unlocked door of the Company's combined mess.

This was a long single-storey wooden building, similar to most of those the Army hired in the village. A third of the accommodation was a lounge area of easy chairs and coffee tables, the rest, a number of two men bunk rooms off a single narrow hallway, running down one side of the interior.

The only occupant in the building at the time was Sergeant Friar, the thirty-five-year-old, greying, overweight, Second in Command of 7 Platoon, who sat with his back to the door reading a paper, resting his injured ankle on one of the coffee tables. On hearing the door burst open, followed by a rustling whoosh noise, 'Tuck' threw his paper down annoyed that someone had left the door ajar, allowing this unexpected wind to blow it open.

With an effort he eased his bad foot onto the floor to gingerly stand

up. On looking around, what met Friar's angry frown turned his face pale, widening his eyes in shocked disbelief.

Through the door a channel of flaming water poured, spreading outwards across the room with the deadliness of a lava flow.

Already the window curtains near the door were alight, and climbing upwards to the wooden ceiling. Friar unable to take his eyes off the advancing flames, began to back-peddle away, stumbling and scrambling over the furniture in a flat panic. Oblivious of his injured ankle he ran down the hallway to his room, scooping up some of his possessions he thought most valuable, he again entered the hall to make his escape.

The petrol-topped liquid was now trickling down the passageway, lapping its tongue of flames at the doorways and wooden panelling. Friar, fighting desperately to wrench open a window, again staring transfixed as the fiery flow closed on him.

When the window finally opened, it did so with a crash. Friar stooped to pick up his best boots, but the flames got there first. 'Tuck' with a scream left everything, falling more than jumping through the opened window, to disappear into the virgin snow below.

Back on the road, Kennedy and crew hadn't moved, all six watching spellbound as the bottom pool of fire entered the mess. Scouse Holgarth was the first to take positive action, turning to Paddy Kieran he said, "I'm going for a shit," then tossing his pick into a snow bank, buggered off.

Billy began to trot down the now cleared road, followed by the others. At the top of the steps leading to the mess the fatigue-party stopped to watch as smoke drifted out the open door. They knew something had to be done but just what they couldn't decide. To try and extinguish the fire looked pointless, entering the building would only put any would-be fire fighter in danger.

Even 'Tuck' Friar's snow-covered hysterical, gesturing arrival onto the road, after struggling out of the drifts below, couldn't change the outcome. With flailing arms and verbal directions of, 'go there', 'do this', 'get him', he tried to organize counter action, but in the end the finale found the whole Company standing on the road watching the mess burn to the ground. Most snickered and giggled like school girls, but not the six members of the fatigue party, oh no not them.

Later that afternoon, all six were marched in on OC's orders, charged by Black, who leapt at the chance to do so, hungry for revenge against the bastards who burned all his Army and civilian kit. They were marched one by one into the OC's Office by CSM Vallis,

who had also lost all his belongings, and the man to judge them and pass sentence was sitting at his desk, wearing the only clothes he now had left this side of Limassol.

In this court of law, Kennedy and Co knew they were going to be hammered. No sentence was passed that afternoon, instead they were remanded for Commanding Officers' Orders, which meant they would receive either a stiff jail sentence or be put forward for court-martial proceedings.

Kennedy, Berrill, Holgarth and Kieran weaved their unsteady way up the slope of the road, on their return to the Company billets. It was three in the morning and all four were drunk. After the events of the day, and the future not holding much joy for them, they decided the only thing to do was to get drunk.

They didn't fancy the NAAFI, because of the stick that would be aimed at them, so instead chose a Cypriot bar a mile down the road, that stayed open until their money ran out.

By the time the platoon billets were reached, the cold and the climb had almost sobered the four of them. The first accommodation but was 9 Platoon's, where Kieran and Holgarth hurried through the door to escape the night's low temperature.

"Christ, it's dark in here," said Kieran trying to adjust his eyes to the gloom.

"Fuck it, I'll get the lights," answered Holgarth, breaking the standing rule, that all late comers make their way to bed without turning the light on.

As Holgarth pressed the switches up, the light produced was not of the normal artificial brightness, instead the electric bulbs strained to pierce through a fog of floating oily black soot that filled the large single room.

"Fucking hell," exclaimed Paddy wiping his hands across his face, trying to ward off the thick, gently settling film.

Holgarth bent forward trying to see further into the room and discover the cause of the ash fall, for this he only had to look at the nearest paraffin stove. Someone had turned the wicks of the four stoves up to a critical point, where they no longer burned, but smouldered away giving off this heavy soot, that now lay in a thin layer on all surfaces of the billet.

Both men were still in a semi-state of drunkenness, but luckily sober enough to spot what this greasy fog was doing to the sleeping men.

As Kieran bent over the occupant of the nearest bed, the man's face stood out greyish from the soot, but of immediate danger the breathing passages were thick with its blackness. With his nose blocked the now open mouth unknowingly was doing the body's breathing for it. Paddy considering his heritage, and the state of his intoxicated mind was remarkably quick witted.

"Scouse go get help, get da boys."

Holgarth not too sure what the drama was, hesitated as Kieran ran to pick up the paraffin stoves.

"For fuck sake go on, some a dees blokes could be dead." Holgarth still none the wiser ran out the door anyway.

Berrill and Kennedy were the first to arrive, just as Paddy heaved the last of the fires out into the snow. The next ten minutes were spent waking and dragging the members of 9 Platoon outside the billet. Many were in a stupor, others once in contact with fresh air vomited.

Most were recovered from the initial dizziness within an hour, but some who were still drunk from their intake at the NAAFI, had to be carried into other billets, hopefully to sleep their recovery off. The next morning a doctor was called for, to examine those that still felt nausea.

Although no one had any prolonged effects, the event was one that could have ended on a more serious note. If it hadn't been for Kieran and Holgarth's drunken arrival, the soot would have had another three hours in which to clog nose and mouths.

Major Hanning walked into the Company Office on his way through to his own office, which now doubled as his bedroom. He had just spent the last two hours outside in the Company lines, ensuring that his men were recovering and being properly attended to, after being one of the first on the scene, having woken with the shouting of Berrill and Kennedy.

As he passed his Sergeant Major's desk, he reached into the out tray, picking up the six charge sheets, made out against the ice clearing detail. Without pausing, he continued into his own office tearing the charge sheets into pieces as he walked, where at his desk he stopped to drop the bits into his wastepaper basket.

Although Wednesday afternoons were intended for the troops to take part in organized sports, there were exceptions to the rule, like today, when the battalion was playing a home rugby match against RAF Akrotiri, in the league which involved most of the major British units

on the island.

At 1400 hours all the Paratroopers not on duty were paraded in their second best KD uniform, and marched down to the sports' ground at the bottom of the hill, to support the home team. These spectators consisted of six hundred Paras, most of whom would rather have been across the road in Alex's bar drinking Keo, and a few dozen of the RAF players' and supporters' families.

As the game kicked off, two young boys ran across to the near-by basketball pitch to climb about on one of the basket upright frames. This frame, knocked together in some REME workshop was of two inch metal piping, with a base rest that had no permanent weight, which was intended for ease of handling. The weight, normally sand bags, would be laid on the four foot backward pointing base rest of the frame, in this way anchoring the apparatus in its upright position.

As the two boys climbed about the metal frame, one on each stanchion, the stand's point of balance, became critical. Slowly the top began to tilt forward. A girl, not more than three or four, had come across to stand in front of the frame, watching her brother and his friend play.

When the two boys realized what was happening both quickly dropped to the ground, but too late the whole thing was already toppling. The little girl oblivious to the danger, stared upwards in curious wonder only showing fear at the last split second, before the lower edge of the basket's wooden rebound board chopped her into the clay pitch.

As the two boys raised the alarm, the atmosphere turned first from concern, to distress, and then as the mother arrived, to hysteria. On lifting the frame, the girl lay with ribs and vital organs crushed, eyes half closed, blood seeping from mouth and nose.

Her mother crouching over the child reached with her arms, as she did so her daughter gave one painful plea, "Mummy it hurts."

Then she died.

Lieutenant Gilham led a very tired 8 Platoon up a narrow re-entrance, out of a steep-sided wadi that they had been lost in for the last five hours. 'C' Company was on an exercise that had started with a parachute descent the morning before. Now after a series of force marches and platoon attacks, they were at the final assault position, and should have been attacking their enemy at this very moment.

Should have been, because at midnight Major Hanning had sent 8

Platoon on a flanking movement, with the intention of placing them unknown to the enemy just off to one side. At a set time just before dawn, they were to open fire, distracting the enemy while Major Hanning, with the rest of the Company, attacked their surprised flank.

The plan went adrift, when the platoon found they had trapped themselves in a wadi, too steep to climb and without an exit. Ashamedly Gilham reported this to the OC by radio and was ordered back.

With the sky beginning to brighten from the east, the platoon in one single weary line entered the Company's hasty defensive position. Seven Platoon HQ was a tree which their Commander, Lieutenant Chuter sat against. A metre away his signaller being stagged by the Platoon Commander, lay sleeping under a poncho. Chuter, with a green lightweight blanket covering his legs, the radio headphones clutching his beret, broke into a smile as Gilham approached.

"And where have you been my little man?" he asked as the other Officer stopped.

"Out trying to make your soldiering that little bit easier that's what," replied Gilham turning to wave his column on.

"Oh, and how so is that, my brave warrior from the sky," retorted Chuter still grinning.

Gilham too punch drunk with fatigue to take his tall friend's humour serious, continued a justification for sympathy, "We just spent all night stumbling around this fucking great wadi, trying to get around that lot," he paused to point towards the enemy. "So you could stroll through them this morning."

"Oh that's a pity," Chuter humoured, "But then it hasn't exactly been a bed of roses here you know." With a finger and thumb he flicked at the silvery crust that had settled on his blanket.

"Look I've got dew all over my lightweight."

Gilham seeing it was hopeless gave a little smile back, then turned to rejoin his platoon, returning his friend's jest, "Cylindrical objects Chuter, cylindrical objects to you."

Major Hanning denied of his plan 'A' now implemented plan 'B'. After a quick orders group, in which he explained to his three Platoon Commanders, the format of this now revised attack, the Company began to form itself for a frontal assault. Six Bren gunners were dispatched under Sergeant Black, to a scrub-covered knoll from which they could provide suppressive fire onto the enemy position.

Tony Knight took charge of the Company's three platoon 2 inch mortars, where from a convenient depression in the ground his eyes followed the second hand of his watch. At the pre-arranged time, he gave the order to one of his mortar men to fire. On striking the firing lever, the whole Company watched as the smoke bomb arced its way towards the enemy. With this single bomb, Knight assessed the drift of its smoke and adjusted accordingly.

The three mortars together dropped their bombs on a point of ground, from which the thickening smoke billowed across the enemy position, masking their forward vision. Hanning on judging the smoke to be sufficient, ordered Black to commence firing, then reaching for his signaller's radio hand set, gave the code word to his three platoons that initiated the attack.

With that command, two platoons rose from the start line, 7 on the left, 9 on the right. In a broken line they advanced, eyes searching through the smoke trying to pick out the danger points that would have to be overcome in the final assault. With the six Bren's firing their harmless bulleted-blanks, 'C' Company picked their way at a walking pace, closing the thin barrier of smoke.

Once through, the friendly Brens had to stop for fear of putting its simulated bullets into the backs of their own men. The Brens that now began to fire were the enemies, this fire was answered by the Company's rifle men, who raised their bayoneted SLRs to snap shoot more blanks as they advanced.

Fifty metres from the enemy trenches the Company, bellowing war cries broke into a trot, sweeping through the 'enemy' drums platoon, who obligingly died as the friendly forces charged over them.

Eight Platoon, the reserve platoon, following the main attack, mopped up, checking the dead were dead, the wounded harmless, and the prisoners friendly. Jim Sinclair couldn't resist prodding a short, blond-haired youth with his bayonet, who was sprawled on his stomach half out of a trench, feigning death.

"You lie like that much longer Freddie, and I'll stick a tail on you," joked Sinclair moving on.

The corpse springing to life, sat up to shout after him, in an annoyed tone, "What took you so fucking long, dawn you were supposed to have been here, bleeding dawn."

This assault being the final stage of this exercise, Hanning didn't waste any time. Over the radio he informed all his sub-units to go non-tactical, and RV at a track junction half a mile away, to await the arrival of the vehicle transport.

As per normal the three tonners that were to convey them back to Limassol were late. During this interval the OC held an exercise de-brief, attended by the Platoon Commanders and Sergeants. The men themselves took advantage of the time to put a brew on.

Dougie Abbot having delivered a message to the attached mortar section, passed through the patch of bushes that was 9 Platoon's assembly point. Here everyone was at one stage or another, of boiling water over their small solid fuel cookers.

Paddy Kieran who had been detailed by Sergeant Black, to take on the duties of Mr Roe's batman, was knelt urinating into a mess tin. Roe before he had left for the de-briefing had ordered — not asked or told — but ordered Kieran to make him a drink of tea for his return. Paddy obeying the command was now ensuring that this brew would be a special one.

Some minutes later Roe accompanied by Gilham and Black returned.

"Have a drop of tea before you rejoin your lot Barry," Roe invited, snapping his fingers at Kieran.

The signaller quickly moved in, pushing his own mug towards the 8 Platoon Commander,

"Take mine Sir, I've had plenty."

"Thanks Daniels," smiled Gilham, taking the handle of the shiny aluminium mug.

Kieran now produced two mugs, one for each of the men he disliked the most, Roe and Black. The only comment of any acknowledgement for his effort was from Black, suggesting it may have been a bit on the salty side. All of 9 Platoon watched, and to a man their morale rose higher than it had been for months.

Private 'Armpit' Pridmore picked his way unsteadily through the Company lines. He had been on a lunch time session in the NAAFI, with some of his mates from the machine-gun platoon and was now three parts cut. Pridmore's journey was governed by the thought that his pets might like an afternoon snack, even though he had given them their daily meal at lunch time.

On entering the kitchen of the cook house, he made for the vegetable room, filling his arms with cabbages, turnips and carrots. He neither asked for permission to take nor was he questioned for taking. The cooks who should have prevented him from stealing these rations, found reasons to work elsewhere until he had gone. Nobody interfered

with ‘Armpit’ especially after he had been on the beer.

The piggery compound, thirty metres long and ten wide, was mostly bare ground, except at the gate end, which had a concrete base, on which was a lean-to shelter, and a shed that was the young pigs’ billet, but during the day they slept mostly in the shade of the lean-to. These, now about the size of a fully-grown German shepherd dog, noisily greeted Pridmore, for their sensitive noses had picked up the smell of the vegetables.

With a heave he forced the gate open, pressing back the wall of ham that blocked it. The din of pigs screeching was deafening, but for ‘Armpit’ it was the laughter of his happy friends. With arms full, he picked a wobbly path towards the lean-to, while calling out to his charges, “Here piggy piggy, here piggy.”

At the same time he handed out the vegetables, trying to see that each pig got his share. As the animals greedily devoured their portions, they quickly fought back through the pack for more. Pridmore seeing this happening began to beat them back with a turnip head, which only caused the milling pigs to jump for the swinging vegetable.

One big porker bumped him sideways, causing Pridmore to spill everything to the cement. Losing his temper ‘Armpit’ began to lash out at his unruly flock, punching snouts, jowls, and floppy ears, in an attempt to force them away from the spilt vegetables, but it was hopeless. The pigs were impervious to his blows, resulting in the big man collapsing on the concrete, in a drunken, exhausted sprawl amongst the veg and squabbling pigs.

Bob MacIntyre swung his pick to feel the sudden vibrations as he struck yet another rock. Cursing under his breath he again raised the pick, unaware of the figure standing over him at the edge of his trench.

“How’s the digging?”

“Fucking awful bastard, and who are you for asking anyway?” Rounded MacIntyre at the slightly hunched silhouette in the sun.

“I’m interested in everything that goes on in my camp,” replied Lieutenant Colonel Scott.

“Sorry Sir, didn’t know it was you, thought it was one of the lads,” pleaded Bobby pulling himself into a form of attention.

“That’s alright, it’s answers like that, that makes my little tours worthwhile,” forgave the CO making no effort to suppress his smile. “When will you be finished?”

MacIntyre relaxed to answer the question, “Not long now Sir, another couple of huts to complete, extend this drainage ditch down to the main one by the road, and we’ll be done.”

The CO looked up, pleased that the tents were almost gone, and his men would now have more solid accommodation.

Back at the Battalion HQ the RSM knocked, then entered the Adjutant’s Office.

“He’s gone again,” informed Warr, as he fitted a beret to his head.

The Adjutant sat up, pushing the small wooden sliding window of the communication hatch to the Colonel’s office open, anxiously peering in.

“But I only spoke to him a moment ago,” he. replied, showing his frustration.

“I was just told by the orderly room runner who tried to take him a cup of tea,” explained the RSM.

“Well we had better go find him then Mr Warr,” directed the Adjutant in a resigned tone, reaching for his own beret.

Colonel Scott’s frequent unannounced escapes from his office, were not motivated through the boredom of a man wishing to elude his desk. He was a soldier’s soldier, and believed the only way to gauge the temperament of his men was to seek them out, and chat on their own ground, without the encumbrance of the others. For they only added the air of officialdom to conversations that he wanted very much to be off the cuff.

However, in defence of the ‘others’, like the Adjutant and the RSM, they were obliged to provide a presence during any tour of the camp, whether official or not. Besides it was not good for the subordinates of the Battalion Headquarters element to know less than the Commanding Officer.

Colonel Scott was intercepted on his way towards the cook house, where he intended to pay the cooks a visit. The Adjutant gave no reason for his and the RSM’s arrival and none was asked for, but it did cause the CO to change course.

“I’m just on my way to see how the swine are progressing,” he now decided, swinging half right towards the piggery where Mr Warr would have less opportunity to poke and prod with his pace stick.

The pigs were advertising the fact that it was siesta time, for as they approached a hubble of grunting, snorting and snoring, was the only indication of life within the pen. The Adjutant, sensitive to the

smell and general atmosphere of the place, hung back three or four paces from the fencing.

The RSM whose eyes had been trained over the years to notice what was unstraight, untidy and unpainted, began walking the fence, testing the wood work with the point of his pace stick. Colonel Scott making the effort to show that he really did wish to check the pigs, rested his arms on the chest high fence, looking down on the heap of sleeping porkers on the concrete below.

"I'll speak to Sergeant Major Vallis, about Pridmore putting a coat of paint on this fence Sir, it's beginning to look shabby," informed the RSM slipping his stick under one arm to join the Adjutant.

"Good idea Mr Warr," agreed the CO now taking a keen interest in the animals in the pen, for under the lean-to, cuddled up amongst a layer of pork was the very man, 'Armpit' Pridmore, his mouth wide open, snoring loudest of the bunch. Across his legs lay the head and forequarters of a pig, another's head he cradled in his arms, the snout buried against his neck.

Pridmore's own head was pillowed by a thick ham thigh, with the adjoining tail curling across his face. Scott watched three flies rise and then settle on 'Armpit's' face, as they were rhythmically disturbed by the man's snoring.

"Come! Back to the office Adrian, I think it's time for a cup of tea," ordered the Colonel turning to his Adjutant with, what he hoped was a straight face.

Ken Whyte kept shaking his head and blinking his eyes, in a silent struggle to stay awake. He was neither on guard nor on a duty, his attempt at warding off sleep was a personal one, to try and solve what might be a sordid mystery.

Reg Berrill in the five months he had spent with the battalion, had turned into a bit of a piss artist, having fallen into the habit of going to the NAAFI most nights for a drink. This inevitably led on to him consuming more than he could handle, resulting in a drunken Reg staggering back to his tent to collapse into painless slumber.

A couple of mornings before, he had woken to confess he must have had a wet dream, because of the stains on his sheets. But could only remember the sensation like sandpaper rubbing on his thighs. Ken and Bob MacIntyre exchanged glances, but said nothing.

Now in the small hours of a Monday morning Whyte lay in his cot bed, battling against an unwanted will to sleep, for Berrill had

returned not from the NAAFI this time, but after a night touring the bars of Limassol, arriving back less than an hour ago quite drunk.

With an immediate sense of guilt, Whyte's eyes flashed open, annoyed with himself for having lost his battle, then realized that a sound had disturbed his napping. Reaching under his pillow for the torch he had placed there earlier, he quickly shot its beam around the dark interior of the tent. The light as if guided, came to rest on the one thing within the tent that shouldn't have been there.

A crouched figure dressed in a buttonless Army great coat, black plimsoll shoes and blue pyjamas, with a cap comforter pulled down over his ears, was illuminated raising his head from out of Berrill's uncovered crotch. CSM Vallis blinked into the light for a split second, then like Dracula exposed to a ray of sunlight, threw his arms before his face, leaping up to escape from the tent.

This he found difficult having been blinded by the torch, crashing first into the tent's centre pole, then tripping on a fire bucket as he fought his way out of the canvas doorway. Bob MacIntyre was the first out and after him, but only for a few paces, stopping to hurl an empty lemonade bottle after the fleeing man.

"Go on run ya perverted bastard," he shouted as the missile smashed against a tree trunk, cutting Vallis across the nose with a flying splinter.

"Did you hit him Bobby?" asked Whyte joining him on the cement pathway.

"No, hit the fucking tree beside the bastard."

"I'm going to see Knight about him in the morning," said Whyte turning back to the tent.

And true to his word he did, but Knight could offer no help. Vallis' little indiscretion was well known throughout the battalion, but he had never been caught in the act by anyone of authority, and was generally considered to be too good a soldier to compromise over something so insignificant as a mild homosexual tendency.

So at precisely 06.45 hours that morning, CSM Vallis marched onto the parade ground before the whole Company to begin the weekly Muster Parade, showing not one twinge of guilt or remorse, flaunting his Elastoplastered nose as if it were a medallion.

Dave Urwin woke for the hundredth time in the last seven hours, chilled and shivering. The night had not been cold, it was just that Dave and his three companions had not been prepared to spend an

unsheltered night out of doors. Dave looked at his watch in the early dawn light to see it was almost 5.00 am. Pulling his smock, which he was using as a blanket, tighter around his shoulders, then adjusting his head on the web equipment which was his pillow, he tried once again to slip off into a form of sleep.

The small four man party, Dave, Reg Berrill, Bob MacIntyre and Ken Whyte, were camped around the remains of a camp fire they had lit the evening before, at the base of a cliff halfway up the southern side of the Kyrenia Mountains. They, along with the rest of 'C' Company, were involved in an adventure training exercise, that was to take them from one end of the Kyrenias to the other.

Yesterday morning they had set out in small groups of threes or fours, to march on set legs from one point to another. With a map and a compass, the parties would make their best speed to a given grid reference, on finding it, normally a track, or road junction, or a water well, one of the Company Corporals would be waiting to send them off in another direction, searching for the next grid reference.

These mountains were formed as a natural coastal barrier, two to three thousand feet high, running the whole length of the island's north coast, from Morphou Bay in the west to the tip of the panhandle peninsula in the east. Like a broken window pane it jutted up, the shores of the Mediterranean one side, the fertile Cyprus plains on the other, looking down and dominating both.

The Kyrenias were beautiful but also rough, the British Army had just spent the latter half of the last decade patrolling, ambushing and continuously sweeping through these peaks, in a vain attempt to flush out and destroy the EOKA Guerilla terrorists.

Dave finally gave up trying to sleep and climbed to his feet, slipping his smock on to hurriedly fasten the zipper. It was their own fault for having spent the night out. But yesterday afternoon had been hot and that village bar inviting, no one wanted to leave and when they did, time had overtaken them, stranding the four in the blackness of night at the foot of this cliff.

According to the map, the Company base camp with its hot food and thick-quilted sleeping bags were less than two miles away, on the other side of that cliff.

Urwin stood with his hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched, wishing the sun was a little higher so he could feel its warmth. Throughout the surrounding hills, breaking the still morning quiet, a musical shrill could be heard, some far off and faint, others near at hand, giving a piercing lilt. These were the mountain goat herders out

since before dawn and now directing their dogs in the shepherding of the herds, with each his own distinctive whistle. Dave didn't pay much attention to this, but in future days he would remember Cyprus, and this haunting melodious unorchestrated mountain chorus.

In the daylight the cliff presented no obstacle, for a route up and over was easily found. The camp they discovered was also awake, with men up and shaving, but most important of all the cooks were about to serve breakfast.

This day was to be one of rest. After the morning meal, inter-platoon sports was played, with the afternoon being free for everyone to do whatever they pleased, while in the evening a Company smoker was planned.

The camp area had been sited in a basin formed by two peaks, which the main Nicosia Road wound into and then out of, to drop in a series of hairpin bends down the north face to Kyrenia town, on the coast. On the northern peak crowning its rocky summit was a crumbling medieval castle, built by Richard the Lionheart during a stopover on his way to the Crusades in the Holy Land.

Later that afternoon, Urwin leaned over the lip of the stone work of the castle, which faced north and seeing a small patch of grass on a ledge just a few feet below, decided to step over for a rest and a butcher's at the view. While opening a can of beer, he slowly began to realize that what he was watching was breathtaking.

To the west the Kyrenia Range, losing none of its grandeur, dimmed in a tender haze where the last hills turned into the sea. To his front a cliff face dropped straight down almost from the end of his boots' heels. At its base the mountain sloped out, and gently downwards to woods and small farms.

By rocking forward, Dave could just see the harbour and town of Kyrenia resting on the coast below. Seawards to the north, steamers and freighters could be seen, so far away they seemed frozen on the blue Mediterranean surface, and further in the distance fifty miles or more, purple Turkish mountains rose out of the sea apparently unsupported by land.

Finally to the west, cream-coloured hills steadily receded along the panhandle, to sedately fade into the pale blue of the island's Eastern waters. Three hours later as the sun set, Urwin returned to the camp and the Company smoker where the men had already begun to sing.

This procedure was continued for two weeks, one day hiking, one resting. As the soldiers finished the last leg of the journey down the length of the mountains, most looked upon it as a break from the

camp routine, something else to eat up the days, towards that longed for return to good old Blighty.

Major Hanning however, viewed it in a completely different light. For him this had been a subtle trick to improve the skills and physical performance of his men. As he watched the small parties trickle off the final foot hill at the extreme end of the panhandle, he knew that during this fortnight their ability and confidence in the use of a map and compass had vastly improved.

As for their fitness, his eyes answered that, the men marched in, not limping or shuffling, they marched in, most standing to drink the Colour Sergeant's tea before selecting a piece of ground to spend the night on.

At the height of a Cypriot summer in 1961, 'C' Company like a caterpillar evolving a metamorphic change, began to alter its appearance.

The first was quick, uncontrolled and good news to the men. CSM Vallis had been on a two week soccer referees' course at Dhekelia Garrison. There he was caught in the sports' ground showers forcing his attentions on a thirteen-year-old-boy, the son of a Royal Engineer Major. Vallis found himself on a flight back to Aldershot within 48 hours. This of course left 'C' Company without a CSM a void that had to be quickly filled. Major Hanning knew who he wanted and put his nomination to the CO.

Sergeant Major Tony Knight, sat at his new desk facing Colour Sergeant Ducker and the Company's three Platoon Sergeants. The shirt he wore was freshly starched and pressed, but the non-sun-faded area, where his Sergeant stripes had recently been, stood out.

"Gentlemen I'll make this short," he began, looking from face to face as he spoke. "My promotion came suddenly but now that I have it, it is best I put you all in the picture. Except in the mess, from now on you will refer to me as Sir. In private and within these four walls I may use your first name, but as of today you will never use mine. Is that clear?"

On being given an affirmative reply all four were dismissed. Colour Sergeant Ducker along with other Colour Sergeants in the Battalion was not happy about this move, for Knight had leap-frogged men far senior in time and service to him. But the CO made the decision and that was the end to any complaints or discussion on the matter.

The new Platoon Sergeant of 8 Platoon, who stood before CSM Knight that morning had been drafted in to fill the slot from the mortar platoon. He, after finishing his two year tour in the depot, as a

recruit Platoon Sergeant, had arrived in Cyprus three months earlier, it was Sergeant Ron Allander.

The next change was a week later, and just as sudden. At the head of the Persian Gulf lay a small oil-rich sheikhdom, Kuwait. Its neighbour to the north, was Iraq whose leader General Kassem, had begun to make threats of invading and annexing the smaller state. Britain who relied heavily on Kuwaiti oil, did not hesitate in providing assistance.

The first troops to arrive were a Company of the Guards, rushed up from Bahrain, an island further south in the Gulf. Then a squadron of tanks were landed from an assault craft, whose task it was to patrol the shores of the oil states in the event of just such an emergency.

Initially this was all the local force that could be called upon. However, signals began to flash from Whitehall to Garrison stations, activating contingency plans that suddenly had soldiers, sailors and airmen on the move. From Kenya two Battalions of Infantry, from Aden more tanks, a squadron of Hunter jet fighters, and an aircraft carrier with seven hundred helicopter assault Marine Commandos, and from Cyprus the 5th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

Lieutenant Colonel Scott told the officers attending his orders group, officially that the battalion would shortly be moving to Kuwait. This was no surprise, it had been rumoured about the camp for the last day, but now they were given definite dates, timings, facts and orders that could be used to motivate their men. Not that this was necessary, the battalion had just spent two years enjoying the island's good life, and now here was a chance of action, against some big-mouthed tin-pot Hitler.

For the next two days the battalion was in constant motion, drawing weapons, ammunition, rations, and all the other paraphernalia that was needed to fight a war. There was also a re-shuffling of bodies, as the battalion broke down to its order of battle.

Machine gun and anti-tank detachments from Support Company, joined their respective rifle Companies. Signallers, cooks, drivers and other supporting elements from HQ Company also dispersed to add their special talents. A handover of all the camp and its responsibilities, had to be done at the double to those remaining behind on the rear party.

'Armpit' was showing and explaining what was expected at the piggery to the DRO (Dining Room Orderly) Corporal, Lance Corporal Fenwick who had been detailed to take the job on. Fenwick listened and nodded his head as Pridmore explained the feeding and cleaning

routine. Even confirming that he had understood their names, but really he wasn't interested, to him this job was going to be a pain in the ass.

The morning before the actual move began, a Lance Corporal from 9 Platoon knocked on CSM Knight's office door, to explain he had entered the billet just as the platoon finished drawing lots, to see who would shoot Sergeant Black as soon as the opportunity arose.

That evening as 9 Platoon flew east to the Gulf, Black was also on a plane flying west to a new posting in Blighty. At dusk the Companies were shuttled by three ton lorries to RAF Akrotiri, where they boarded chartered civilian aircraft, to begin the overnight flight to Kuwait.

At dawn the next morning, the British United Airways plane that was transporting the bulk of 'C' Company began to circle a single concrete airstrip. Most of the men who had been sleeping, were now rubber-necking trying to see out of the nearest window.

Dave Urwin hadn't slept at all, mostly it was keyed-up anticipation but partly it was the stewardesses. There always seemed to be one travelling the aisle with tea and coffee, but the drinks were not the attraction it was them, with their trim figures, stockinged legs and stimulating scent.

Once the Pilot judged the visibility to be sufficient to enable a safe landing, he put his aircraft into its approach run. On the engines stopping, the troops began to climb out of their seats carrying their webbed equipment.

From the door, the only means of exiting was found to be a canvas chute the men had to slide down. Once on the ground everyone became aware of the intense heat. Reg Berrill trying to escape what he thought was the uncomfortable warmth still radiating from the engines, trotted first ten metres, then twenty, then thirty, finally at one hundred metres from the plane he realized this inescapable heat was the normal local temperature. It was 0600 hours, with the thermometer touching 34°C and climbing.

On collecting and unpacking their weapon bundles, the Company sat unshaded, rifles and machine guns in their hands. As the temperature steadily rose, some of the men stripped their now unpleasant smocks, hoping this would give them a degree of relief. At last vehicles arrived, large American buses, that took them onto a dual-carriageway running straight across desert, to what looked to be a modern town four or five miles distant.

Kuwait had just begun its oil boom, and was at present using this new found wealth to build herself along Western lines, into a

prosperous future. The airport, although at present nothing more than a single runway, with a small control tower, sitting amongst sandy desert, would in a few years rival anything in Europe. This was to be the trend around the whole capital and its surrounding suburbs, through the fertility of oil, Manhattan was about to grow on the shores of the Persian Gulf.

Within the town, a newly-built college was used as the assembly point for the battalion. Here the Companies were sorted out for the next move into a defensive position, North towards the Iraq border.

Just after noon Mr Gilham called the platoon around him, to brief them on the next move. Shortly everyone would be travelling by road, to the north of the town, to dig in astride a strategic route leading down from Iraq. Once in, they would wait for events to develop.

“What about these Iraqis Sir?” asked Dougie Abbot, “Do you think they’ll have a go?”

“Doubt it Abbot,” replied Gilham. “The CO doesn’t think so either, he said that everyone in the know agrees, Kassem is in an advanced stage of syphilis, which is causing him to rant and rave like a maniac.”

The battalion convoy set off into the desert along a tarmac road, looking very unmilitary in their borrowed transport. Once outside the city, an indication that Kuwait was on a war footing became apparent. A small number of British made tanks and armoured cars, with Arab crews were seen off to the sides of the road, this it turned out was the bulk of the country’s regular Army.

Kuwait being a sparsely populated desert sheikdom, a large full time defence force was out of the question, but in time of crisis there were soldiers to call upon. These were the desert Bedouin, who being proud and loyal men, did not hesitate to answer the Sheikh’s rallying cry. They could be seen in scattered bands up and down the road, some travelling in the backs of open American pick-up trucks, others riding camels or squatting around their tents pitched beside the roadway.

As if straight off a Hollywood set, these warriors of various ages but each looking impressively the same, in full, but practical ankle length robes watched the passing of the paratroopers with bronzed hook-nosed faces, that gazed out from under the traditional hatta cloth and angogal securing cord head dress. Across their chests hung leather ammunition pouches containing 303 calibre rounds, for the weapon that was religiously cherished and never out of their reach, the British bolt action Lee-Enfield rifle.

After several miles, the vehicles pulled off the road to de-bus the

troops. It was mid-afternoon now, but the intensity of the heat had not yet begun to lessen. On the buses the men had slouched, unable to talk, the effort in doing that most basic of actions was just too much. Instead each tried to find an escape sleeping, drinking the now warm liquid from their water bottles, or thinking of better times.

None of these worked, for there was no escape. The hot engulfing fire that numbed minds and turned fit active men into weakened geriatrics, was a situation that would have to be accepted and overcome by each man in his own way.

In fact as the Paratroopers stood at the edge of the road waiting for the next move, few realized that the sand storm which added to their discomfort was also a reprieve. For the oven hot, dusty wind that restricted visibility and blew sand in their eyes, was also holding the temperature down to a mild 40°C!

The only man foolish enough to waste his strength and generate suicidal body heat was the CO. He, pipe clenched between his teeth, walked the road, from Company to Company, shoulders stooped, plodding like a West Country farmer, giving a smile or grin to those he didn't speak to. In the next few days 5 Para was going to need a lot more men capable of setting a Commander's example as Lieutenant Colonel Scott was now doing.

CHAPTER 10

You may talk o' gin an' beer
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,
An' you're sent to penny-fights an' Aldershot it;
But when it comes to slaughter
You will do your work on water,
An' you'll lick the bloomin' boots of 'im that's got it.

Rudyard Kipling

With an effort that had taken several minutes of concentrated motivation, Sergeant Allander rolled slowly out from under the shade of his make-shift awning. Crouching for some seconds on his hands and knees, he reached back into the shadows, where Dougie Abbot still lay in a heat induced half-unconscious stupor, to collect his beret. Gripping his rifle, he rose with closed eyes to stand unsteadily, his head swimming. Blinking in the dazzle of the sun, he looked about, having to again reassure himself regarding his bearings.

The position the Battalion had taken up, was astride the tarmac road, a mile or so south of a small ridge which stretched eastwards a short distance to the Gulf, and as far as could be seen to the west, at right angles to the road. This ridge, although only a few hundred feet in height, was to be the main defensive position for the British Forces. Holding the ridge was the Marine Commando and one other battalion from Kenya.

5 Para were given the role of reserve behind, on the desert. Lieutenant-Colonel Scott's disposition was conventionally simple, 'A' Company straddling and to the east of the road, 'B' Company to the West, with 'C' forming a southern short leg of an L on 'B' Company's flank facing due West.

Beyond 'C' Company the desert advanced westward, unending for eight hundred miles where it was only temporarily halted by the Red Sea, before continuing on for another three thousand miles across Africa to the Atlantic shores.

Allander stopped at the blanketed shelter occupied by Lieutenant Gilham and his signaller, which showed only two pairs of denim and boot-clad legs protruding into the sunlight.

“I’m just going around now Sir,” informed the Sergeant finding it an effort to speak, and not recognizing the croaking voice that had spoken. One of the four legs drew up, bending at the knee allowing it to rest sideways on the sand.

“OK, check Dutfield, he didn’t look too good when I was round,” came Gilham’s slow reply.

Since 1000 hours when the sun became dangerous, both men had been taking hourly turns touring the trenches to monitor the men, and check how they were coping with the conditions. The platoon’s area was in the centre of the Company defensive layout.

The day before, Mr Gilham had sited his sections in accordance with the Company Commander’s orders, but as to its tactical defending qualities it had none. This was merely a flat piece of desert where 5 Para were to wait for something to happen.

The Sergeant walked across to 1 section, who were the reserve section behind platoon HQ inspecting them first, then swinging in a loop around to 2 and 3 who were the forward defences. Everywhere, the men were the same, lying lifeless under a make-shift shade shelter, rigged from digging tools and ponchos or blankets. Their trenches whether unfinished or fully dug were a joke, the surface sand, like dirty sugar, loose and shifting had no firm body to it, on digging lower the packed sand crumbled at the slightest touch causing the edges to spill inwards, turning what was supposed to be even sided, two man weapon trenches, into hollow craters.

At 2 section, Allander found Private Dutfield lying in the open sun. His shelter not being very well made, had fallen apart leaving him exposed. This time of day, under this sun, no one could remain unaffected for long. The Sergeant stood over him for some moments, staring down at the form sprawled on its stomach one arm under his head, the other over, trying to protect it from the sun’s scorching rays. Allander’s boot kicked into the young soldier’s thigh, in two slow but painful jabs.

“Dutfield up, up, come on get this basher sorted,” rasped the Sergeant through dried lips.

Dutfield shocked by the kicks, sat up then seeing who it was slowly climbed to his knees to begin work.

“When did you last drink?” Asked Allander.

“Don’t know Sarge. I’ve run out,” came the reply.

The Sergeant watched as he struggled, to tie a piece of string to a shovel handle being used as a tent pole, then sinking to his knees

beside the younger man, began to fumble at one of the water bottles attached to his webbing.

Billy Kennedy sat on his equipment outside of the shelter he was sharing with Sam Kyle. They were two sections Bren gun team, Kyle the gunner, Billy his number two. As Allander sluggishly paced his way towards them, Kennedy broke into a grin.

"'Ere look at all this sunshine and sand Sarge, people pay good money to come to places like this," greeted Kennedy waving his arm at the baking desert.

Allander appreciated the humour, glad to see at least one person in the platoon who was not overcome by the sweltering heat. But unable himself to counter the joke with a joke, it was taking every ounce of will he had just to get himself around the platoon's perimeter.

"You alright Kennedy?" Asked the Sergeant genuinely worried that the sun may have affected his mind.

"Sure Sarge. This place ain't so bad, I spent three school summers at Southend so I'm used to it, ain't I." This time Allander was able to return the grin.

"How's Kyle?" He asked nodding towards the pair of legs beside the Bren gun, which was seen sticking out from under the near-by shelter.

"OK, he's having a kip just now. But we're short of water Sarge."

"I know we should have a re-sup this evening," replied the Sergeant.

"Well they don't need a re-sup I've watched those geezers at Battalion HQ queueing up for ice lollies and lemonade all day."

Allander looked back across the heat-hazed sand in the direction Kennedy had nodded his head.

On the main road over a mile away he could see parked coloured vans, and around them soldiers from the battalion.

'I hope those bastards are giving it away, if we got to come to this hell hole and fight their fucking battles for them it's the least they can do,' thought Allander, keeping his anger to himself. As he moved on towards 3 section he gave Kennedy an order, "At sunset I want a latrine dug, just out there away from the trenches."

"OK," acknowledged the Londoner still grinning, "It'll be the deepest and most comfortable in Kuwait Sarge."

The battalion had been in the desert for only twenty-four hours, but already it was on its knees. Everywhere short comings were

appearing in equipment, stores and people. The soldiers had arrived with two bottles and a canvas water bag, but now the problem was keeping them full. There were water lorries, but these could not leave the road as they would soon sink in the sand. Water cans were the next best thing, but of these there was a shortage.

The local water point also proved a problem. This was one single tap at a Police post, at the top of the ridge. In the evening men could walk and work, which meant water was delivered or fetched, but during the day it was near impossible. As yet the battalion was not acclimatized and wouldn't be for another two days, in the meantime everyone could only sit and suffer, rapidly dehydrating in the burning midday heat.

This second day no sand storm blew, instead static, hot, oppressive heat surrounded everyone as if radiating from an inescapable grill, the temperature was 48°C in the shade. This was not just uncomfortable, it drained and sucked the body fluids, leaving the mind without the will to fight back or even care.

No one sweated in Kuwait, it evaporated from the skin as soon as it left the pores. Water was all important, food you could do without, but water had to be taken and in large amounts. The Medical Officers' directive, shortly to be given to the battalion was that every man was to drink sixteen pints a day.

Those like 'C' Coy on the outer limits of the Battalion position, had started the day before with four, two bottles and the water bag. That evening the Company Land Rover arrived with some jerry cans, but it only gave each man the chance to fill one bottle.

Dave Urwin, opened his eyes to see the sun just appearing on the horizon. As the blood red curve slowly crept up from the east, Urwin watched, and venomously cursed it. He cursed from the depth of his heart, never in his life had he hated anything as much, for from it stemmed all the agony and torture, that was turning him into an insane creature.

The day before, he like most others had struggled to find relief from the suffocating oven conditions, but there was none and now he had another day of the same ahead. The night just past, had been hot and oppressing, causing him nauseous sleeplessness, at one point vomiting into a mess tin, but not wishing to waste the precious fluid by spilling it away into the sand, had drunk the contents back down.

At noon that day, Sergeant Allander left 8 Platoon for good.

Colour Sergeant Ducker had made the statement on arriving in the Company position, "That this place would sort the men out from the

boys," and so it proved. He was 'casualty evacuated' by air, down to Aden, where sixteen salt tablets had to be cut out of his gullet.

Ron Allander was given his job.

Throughout the battalion, the Commanders and the men were reacting to this test of character in various ways. The CO was attempting to move heaven and earth, in gaining any form of relief for his men, as were most Company Commanders. Except OC 'A' Coy Major Winstanley, his answer to this hell-fired environment was to work his men through the day, believing this would take their minds off the acid heat that engulfed them. They responded at first, but as their strength seeped from them they either collapsed or quit. This forced the NCOs into the predicament of having to charge their men for refusing to obey orders. Finally the CO stepped in, stopping all work from 1000 hours till 1600 hours.

Within 'C' Company individual reactions were predictable. Lieutenant Chuter was single-handedly fighting the good fight, constantly on the move inspecting his men, keeping their spirits up and looking to their needs. His second in command, Sergeant 'Tuck' Friar spent the daylight hours moaning and groaning under his basher, in a fog of self-pity.

Lieutenant Roe collapsed the moment he arrived on 9 Platoon's patch of sand, only moving when he was called for by the OC or to gulp down his or anyone else's water. With Sergeant Black gone, the role of Platoon Sergeant had been taken on by the senior Corporal, he alone, through his own efforts and example kept the men functioning as a platoon.

Eight Platoon, with newly promoted Allander moved up, also had a senior Corporal as their new Platoon Sergeant. His section was now under the command of Ken Whyte, which also caused a move for Dave Urwin, he was given the job as the new section Bren gunner. Bob MacIntyre as the Number two should have taken over, but Dave was the better shot, so he was appointed.

Somehow this new day also passed, but not without events. The first was the self-destruction of one of the Hunter jet fighters. In the morning they provided a dawn patrol that buzzed the ridge in a low dive, probably to boost the soldiers' morale by showing them the RAF was about. But that only works if you pull out of your dive in time. Billy Kennedy and Sam Kyle watched it strike the ground above the ridge. They didn't actually see it hit, but there was no doubt about the sound and the pillar of black smoke which rose straight up in the breathless morning air.

At midday ‘Armpit’ Pridmore arrived dragging a large camouflage net. Sergeant Allander had found several of these at Company HQ and despite the fact that the Company Land Rover was away collecting water, he was determined to get this added gift of shade to the platoons. He, at that moment, was dragging another towards 9 Platoon. Jim Sinclair, found himself detailed by Lieutenant Gilham to escort Dutfield to the regimental aid post. Dutfield had looked bad all morning and the Lieutenant wasn’t taking any chances that he might snuff it.

Dave Urwin watched them go from the prone position, under the shade he now shared with Bob MacIntyre. It was early afternoon, and except for the two figures leaving the platoon position, no one moved. In moving you generated energy, energy meant heat, and there was enough of that already. Dave settled himself on his back, arms beside his body. Except for boots and PT shorts, he like most of the battalion was naked.

In a sluggish semi-stupor, he had just spent the last hour dragging himself up into the Mourne Mountains, to the cool deep waters of the Silent Valley reservoir. As a school boy, he and his class had been taken there for a day’s outing. Now he closed his eyes to begin the journey again, by foot, to end crawling over its bank into the deliciously chilled liquid, sinking below the surface to drink and drink. He made his journey several times that day, each one taking him that much closer to sunset.

Before he could begin the last journey, Dave moved his tongue up to the roof of his mouth where two sandpaper surfaces scraped together. Under normal conditions the mouth is never absent of moisture, but here in Kuwait, at high summer the blistering environment was capable of drying even these fluids, causing it to adopt the texture of the inside of an earthenware pot.

Urwin, in a panic, tried to generate spit, but none would come, his tongue and mouth were as dry as cardboard. Hurriedly he reached up for his water bag, making himself flinch by accidentally placing the other hand in burning sand. The canvas water bag hanging from his shovel handle was the salvation of the battalion. Made in HM prisons, they provided the only means of having a cool drink. The water by gradually seeping through the canvas, would be cooled by the hot desert breezes, this outer cooling would lower the temperature of the water within. The alternative was the metal water bottles whose contents at midday, were so hot it couldn’t be swallowed.

The battalion medical aid post was an outbuilding of a disused petrol station. There Sinclair and Dutfield staggered through the door

like a couple of last survivors, both now in an advanced stage of dehydration. They had struggled the final quarter of a mile clinging to each other, heads down, rifles dragging behind them. Jim with his arm around Dutfield's neck, felt himself slipping to the floor, whereupon the Medical Officer and two orderlies rushed over to quickly strip his clothes and lay him on a table. There they proceeded to hose him down with a gush of water.

Dutfield left to sway dizzily in the doorway, weakly tapped his chest with a loose fist, croaking in a low pitch hoarse voice.

"Hey I'm the fucker who's supposed to be ill."

The next day proved to be the worst, the constant fight against the heat, the lack of strength through not eating, and the mental strain of believing there would be no end to this ordeal was taking its toll. Morale in 'C' Company was rock bottom, water was now plentiful from jerry cans, but the effort to go to the distribution point, even a mere one hundred metres, was too much for some.

Everywhere inert bodies lay under their shade, hoarding what water they had waiting for the semi-relief of sunset. Sam Kyle watched through gaps in his shade cover, the Marine Wessex helicopters that passed overhead. They flew set runs, which told Sam the men were being constantly relieved, to spend a rest period on board their aircraft carrier, stationed just off the shore.

There had always been acute rivalry between the Paras and the Marine Commandos, especially in the canal zone in the early fifties, but what Sam felt towards them now was not rivalry, he hated their cabbage-headed guts with all his soul.

This day however, was to be the turning point of the battalion's ordeal. The human body given time, can and will adapt to most conditions, and so it was true of even Kuwait in mid-summer. As the men woke next morning, most found to their surprise they had spent the night, if not comfortable at least in long periods of real sleep. The soldiers now began to realize they were hungry, as well as thirsty, causing little hexamine fires to appear throughout the battalion's sandy position. Greedily they began to spoon much needed calories back into their bodies.

With the awareness, that they could take anything this god-forsaken hell hole could throw at them, the men began to climb back onto their hind legs and got stuck in to the job of being soldiers, with a soldier's role. With the aid of sand bags, weapon pits were constructed solidly and correctly. Each man was given an arc of fire to cover with his rifle or Bren Gun.

Telephone links were laid, radio communication was established with all sub-unit HQs, and Commanders now began to take a more professional interest in where their anti-tank weapons were pointing.

Amenities were also improved, Sergeant Allander had large insulated hay boxes buried in the sand at all platoon locations. These were filled with water, and from somewhere ice, then tins of fruit juice provided unlimitedly by the Sheikh of Kuwait. It was said, he wanted to give each British soldier a medal for coming to his support, but this was politely refused by the government. For those who had to swelter in the desert heat, the second consideration of fruit juice was far more practical and gratefully received by all the troops.

Dave Urwin sat on the wooden box that was the toilet seat of the platoon latrine. It was early morning and although the sun was up it remained a cool 32°C. Looking south he studied the village and its prominent gold-domed mosque resting in a hollow, two miles distant.

As he watched Urwin could see an Arab goat boy, stick in hand, driving his goats out of the village towards him. In the evening he would return from beyond the ridge where somehow the animals had spent the day feeding on God knows what.

Shifting his gaze from the solid structures of the mud-bricked village, Dave now examined the dark mass of reed matting across the road, that was the suburban homes for the poor working-class of the country. This matting was used as walls, roofs, floors and fences, and linked from house to house; to Urwin they seemed to stretch for miles, south and eastwards.

He watched as the sound of the workers starting their American cars came to him on the still morning air. One by one, then in their dozens, Mercurys, Pontiacs, Oldsmobiles, Buicks, Dodges and Cadillacs, appeared out of this straw city to race with dusty wakes onto the asphalt road.

‘This must be the only place in the world where the people own expensive flash cars, and live in the crates they come in,’ concluded Urwin, shaking his head while reaching for the toilet paper.

Towards the end of their first week, the battalion was invited by the British Oil Company, to accept the facilities that their employees club had to offer. The CO sent his men down, a quarter of the battalion at a time, over the next four days. As the first batch arrived at the Oil Company’s newly-built leisure facilities, the men were less than happy, over the past days they had slipped into a routine and were grumbling about being dragged away from it. This soon changed once inside, for within the brick walls was a paradise. There they

found cool lounges, bars, and gardens with grass and shady trees.

Most began their day however, in the swimming pool, which was good for them but bad for the pool. Bob MacIntyre not being a swimmer sat on the shaded patio next to the pool, and watched as a hundred unwashed Paratroopers turned the aqua blue water to a deep Mississippi mud brown.

Sam Kyle seeing a sign which said 'Barber Shop', and scraping the stubble on his chin, decided to give it a shot. Twenty minutes later the Pakistani barber had to wake him, the shop's cool air conditioning, the warm towels and the sheer luxury of the shave had put him to sleep.

Billy Kennedy and Reg Berrill realizing they were drinking too much at the bar, thought it best to take a walk, braving the heat outside. As they left the main entrance, to head down one of the boulevards with modern Western bungalows set back either side, an attractive woman pulled up to enquire if they wished a lift. The two soldiers not knowing what to make of the offer replied they were only out for a walk. But the woman wouldn't accept leaving the two on their own, and soon had them in her car.

After a short drive they arrived at her bungalow, there she introduced them to her two young children and her husband who had the day off from his job as a ship's pilot, guiding the tankers in and out of port. For the rest of the day they talked, drank cold lager and played with the children. After a meal eaten in a dining room with chairs, a table, and a table cloth, the husband drove the two soldiers back to the leisure centre, where trucks returned them to their holes in the desert.

Towards the end of their second week, the platoon had slipped into the habit of congregating at sundown around its HQ area. After Lieutenant Gilham gave out the orders of the day and any news of interest to the men, they normally remained in small groups brewing, drinking fruit juice or just talking.

One evening Dougie Abbot switched on his beat up portable radio, one that was held together with sellotape and string. As he turned the dial trying to find a station that churned out something other than the high-pitched nasal drone of the Arab songs, that to Western ears all sounded the same, he caught a tune that from somewhere out of the ether had drifted into his speaker. The song was Helen Shapiro singing her recent hit record, 'You Don't Know'. Everywhere the platoon fell silent, to sit staring into the darkness or down at the sand. When this song finished the station playing it also finished, or the atmosphere

that allowed it to reach Abbot's radio, now bent its beam away towards another part of the desert.

For some minutes no one spoke, then slowly men began to rise and leave. The song was a pop record, but its theme was of loneliness and love, causing emotions within them which under normal circumstances would never have occurred.

Before the battalion could begin its third week of desert habitation a rumour began to circulate that they were shortly to be pulled out, and so it proved. One morning the Paratroopers, Company by Company packed up their belongings to be driven down to the harbour. There awaiting them was a rust bucket of a ship built in the Second World War, and now something the Royal Navy kept in service to transport a squadron of Centurion tanks about the Gulf. This spent the next two days puffing on one propeller, taking 5 Para four hundred miles south to the island Sheikhdom of Bahrain.

As a course was set out into the Gulf waters, relief spread throughout the Battalion. Away from that furnace, thank God they thought. No more sleeping naked through the night, waking to find reptiles and scorpions had shared the under half of the blanket and goodbye to sand storms that blew their hot searing air and sand into eyes, ears and food. But most were thankful for the relief that they were leaving a land that could produce temperatures which reduced fit men to helpless zombies.

From the sea Bahrain looked picturesque and inviting, the town's bright colourful buildings stood out sharply from the surrounding yellow sand, and the green of the many palm trees that in places were almost forests. 5 Para's home for the next fortnight was to be a tented camp, off to one corner of RAF Muharraq, the Royal Airforce airfield built on the salt flats just outside of Bahrain town.

Bahrain in recent history had earned its income through piracy, until subdued by cannon-armed frigates of the Royal Navy. Now the inhabitants were forced to live a new way of life. Like Kuwait, oil had been found which was introducing them to Western wealth.

Here in the tranquil peace and coolness of the island where the temperature seldom rose above 45°C, justice now began to appear. During the first three days in Kuwait, the abominable conditions caused many people to say foolish things. Most were forgotten by those who could make allowances, some however took action. The jail tent was overflowing, and daily jankers' parade had at least one representative from every platoon. Nine Platoon had half a dozen, for when Lieutenant Roe decided he was well enough to inspect his

platoon's trenches, he lashed out like Alice's 'Queen of Hearts'.

As the battalion settled down to a new routine, the camp site was soon found to be a bad choice. The sea seeped about the sand no more than a foot below the surface, which through evaporation caused the top crust of the ground to constantly blister and change, adding more moisture to the already humid unhealthy air which hung as an invisible fog. This dampness drifting upwards day and night, affected the British troops like a mini plague, with morning sick parade rapidly multiplied to almost a full company muster.

Soon there was hardly a man not suffering something. Assorted body rashes, boils, foot-rot, bleeding ulcers and ringworm, were just a few of the more common infections. Unbelievably some of the men began to voice the opinion that they should have stayed in Kuwait, for despite the heat at least its oven sterile air was germ free. God or as he is in this part of the world, Allah, being all powerful and merciful, must have been listening for he benevolently granted their wish.

The 5th Battalion found themselves once again flying into Kuwait airfield, to take over more trench positions. Not however their own, but this time those of an Irish battalion up on the ridge, who were being returned to Kenya. As Reg Berrill struggled with the aid of a shovel, in the scorching midday temperature to shift the encroaching sand, that had been allowed to practically fill his new weapon pit, he fondly wished himself back to the foul smelling, but cool sea breezed airfield on Bahrain Island.

For the next three months the men of 5 Para, sat on the ridge, 'Chuggle Ridge' as it was called, from the nickname given to their water bags, and waited. Not for Kassem to attack, for that impulsive threat had long diminished. The problem presented now was how could he back down without losing face, and how could the British leave, without looking as if they were running away. The dilemma was a political one, and quite rightly was given to the Council of the Arab League to solve.

All through the rest of the summer months the battalion sat and waited. July, August and into September. Finally a plan was decided upon, and although those responsible did drag their feet in implementing it, it was at last carried out.

Neutral Arab countries were to provide troops to take over the British positions in Kuwait. This satisfied both Kuwait and the British, who now had a Force from countries defending Kuwait and British oil supplies, who Kassem would not dare attack, and Iraq could also point out that the threat of invasion by British had also been countered by

these same Forces.

Despite Whitehall's agreement to the present plan, the government was not going to take any chances should a similar act occur which would interrupt the flow of oil to Britain. The decision to have a stand-by reaction force in the Gulf, affected not only 5 Para but also every man presently serving in 16 Parachute Brigade. For the War Office directed that a battalion of British Paratroopers would be stationed on Bahrain indefinitely.

At the end of September 1961, the 5th Battalion was for the second and last time withdrawn from Kuwait. The pull out was done at dusk, for one of the points of the hand over was that those relieving and those being relieved, were not to meet, or have any form of contact with each other. Therefore one evening 'C' Company just picked up their weapons and personal kit, and left the holes in the sand that had been home for almost three months.

Dan Lawton the Company Land Rover driver, tried to drive back onto the position to fetch a back pack that one man of the Company had forgotten. He was able to approach the foot of the ridge, but as he began to climb up a sandy track, the relieving Arab soldiers warned him off with a bullet through his windscreen.

So it was back to Bahrain for another two weeks to wait for the arrival of 2 Para, who were to be the first battalion to initiate the posting. The 2nd Battalion with accompanying families were to have relieved them in Cyprus that very month, with many of the men well prepared for it. Arrangements to be out of the country for three years had been made; cars bought; children taken from or put into boarding schools; and a thousand other details settled.

Now these soldiers were on their way to Bahrain for a six month tour while the families remained in Aldershot. Five Para were given the news that because another battalion was not readily at hand to replace them in Cyprus, they would have to return there for another six months. This was good news to the married men, but looked upon as bad to the single ones, who were in a hurry to get back to good old Blighty.

As 2 Para flew in, pale and despondent, the 5th Battalion re-boarded their aircraft to return to Cyprus.

CHAPTER 11

Oh, to be in England

Now that April's there,

Robert Browning

The new Sergeants' Mess, which replaced the large brown canvas Army marquee tent, was like its neighbouring Twynham billets, plain and functional. The one feature that made it a building with a difference, were the French windows that opened onto a bare cement slabbed patio. This patio, RSM Warr demanded be built as an amenity for the mess, prior to the battalion being called away to Kuwait. The rub was, the mess members were the ones who, on weekends and in evenings had to provide the labour during its construction.

Although a bright sunny warm autumn day, the Sergeants and Warrant Officers of the battalion were all sitting indoors relaxing over the battalion's mid-morning NAAFI break.

Being deeply tanned from their recent 'hols' in the Persian Gulf, none were bothering to add to it by sitting on their new patio, that area they left to the cats that prowled the small cement courtyard, hoping to scavenge food scraps. Jack Spalding, the battalion Drill Sergeant Major, was the first to comment on the number that had increased during their absence. There had always been four or five strays wandering this end of the camp, neither pets nor lodgers, living from dustbins and hand-outs. But for some reason the pickings must have been good while the battalion was away, for now there were never less than a dozen, hovering about the mess at any one time.

After the room had chewed over an 'off the cuff' discussion on these cats, the RSM settled the talk by asking for a solution to rid them from the perimeter of the building.

CSM Knight and Ron Allander who was now promoted to the rank of Colour Sergeant, exchanged smiles as 'Tuck' Friar, always willing to ingratiate himself, volunteered.

'Tuck' waited until the room had emptied, then with a piece of raw lamb taken from the kitchen as bait, he set his lure. With the meat tied to one of the three false wooden pillars in the centre of the room, he half-closed the French windows, to wait several minutes in the hall. Once satisfied that enough of the cats were sniffing and snarling

around the bait, he closed the French windows from the outside, collecting a red netted onion sack, again from the kitchen, as he re-entered the mess dining room to begin his feline round up.

With the sack in one hand, a broom in the other, he chased, cornered, pinned and sacked the cats one after another. As he fumbled with the opening of his cat bag to stuff the last of the furry creatures in, a claw-extended black and white paw reached up out of the tangle from within, to rake three straight, deep, bloody furrows down his forearm. Friar let out a pained curse, “You fucking bastard.” Then swinging the sack, began smashing its trapped inmates against the centre wooden pillar.

WO1 Pride, the battalion Band Master entered the mess five minutes later, hoping for a belated cup of tea. One step inside the door he froze in horror. The dining room had now taken on the appearance of an ante-room to the Spanish Inquisition. There was moggy blood, guts and brains splattered everywhere, ceiling, carpet, furniture, walls and windows. On spotting the hysterical figure of ‘Tuck’ Friar holding a bloody sack while alternately stamping his boots on its grizzly contents, Pride left, backing dumbfounded out of the door.

On returning from Kuwait, with the prospect of another six months’ extension on the tour yet to push, Colonel Scott gave the battalion two weeks’ leave. Those who had been in Cyprus for over a year, were allowed to fly home to spend the fortnight in the UK. Most taking this opportunity found it to be a double-edged sword, enjoying the leave but spending all the money they had saved in banks and posbies (Post Office accounts), while doing it.

Private Pridmore didn’t get home, he spent his leave and more in the battalion jail for assaulting a JNCO. On returning to his beloved pigs he had found them wallowing in unnecessary filth, verging on death from hunger, through Lance Corporal Fenwick’s neglect of them. There were tears in ‘Armpit’s eyes when he cornered Fenwick in his own dining room, where he broke the DRO Corporal’s nose, jaw and three ribs. The CO gave him twenty-eight days, but also busted Fenwick to a Private, for causing the eventual death of two of the battalion pigs.

For those who didn’t have the service in, which would have enabled them to get back to Blighty, it was a case of doing the best you could on the island. Some organized parties to spend their leave skin diving at Famagusta, rock climbing in the Kyrenias or just getting bombed out of their minds at the local wine festival.

Reg Berrill was courting a girl he had met while on a short course,

at the Signal Centre in Episkopi. The only snag was she had a friend, who was forever with her and had to be paired. Since he had been seeing the girl, Reg no longer spent his time and money on drink.

Jim Sinclair wasn't enjoying his leave, so Jim, looking upon it as a worthy cause, would accompany Reg across to 'Epi' whenever he was asked. The two girls were daughters of serving officers, which made it a bit dicey, but only if the girls let it be known they were serious about a Private soldier, however, at this stage Reg and his girl were doing little more than kissing and cuddling.

As for Jim, he had realized early on that the bird he had been lumbered with wasn't interested. She, like Jim was there only to provide the thinly-veiled appearance of a chaperon, never once giving Jim an indication that it should be any different.

Reg and his girl when walking held hands, at the AKC Globe picture house, they sat wrapped in each other's arms and at the beach they snogged on a blanket. While Jim and the other girl just walked, watched and swam or sun-bathed.

On the last Saturday, the battalion was due to finish its fortnight's leave, the two couples spent the evening at a dance being held in the Episkopi NAAFI. As the night began winding down, Jim and his partner slipped into the darkened billiard room to sit out the last few dances.

Sinclair with the cuffs of his white shirt rolled back, stood just inside the door smoking, while watching Reg and the other few couples, who still remained on the dance floor. Partly shrouded in the room's shadows, the girl sat holding a half-finished glass of Bacardi and Coke, also watching, but her eyes were on the handsome young dark-haired Scot in the doorway.

Without altering her gaze, she extended her arm to place the glass on the seat of a near-by chair, then uncrossing her legs, stood up to move silently across the room. Jim started suddenly, half-turning his head as a pair of hands first rested on his shoulders then traced a path downwards to circle around his waist, while a voice close to his ear whispered warmly, "Jock I want you."

Dave Urwin gave up trying to fight the cold causing his limbs to shake uncontrollably and stood up. To the east a thin grey smudge was just beginning to give an indication that the night was almost over. Standing for a moment he studied the patch of ground 8 Platoon had spent the last few hours on — this, an island of damp clay and boulders in a sea of rocky scrub.

Slumped amongst this, trying their best to sleep, were the soldiers of the platoon. Having parachuted onto the shores of Morfu Bay the evening before, they were now involved in an exercise devised by the Commanding Officer, to shake the cobwebs from everyone's head after the recent two weeks' leave. The first phase of this had been a night march, from the DZ to the northern foothills of the Troodos Mountains.

Here they were expected to spend the day laying up, awaiting the evening when they would move on to a grid reference. Here an agent would be met, capable of guiding them to a shepherds' hut to kill the occupants who were known terrorists. The final phase was to be a march out over the mountains, to a safe RV where vehicles would collect them.

Jim Sinclair was sitting crossed-legged, hunched behind the section's Bren gun doing his sentry stag. He was in fact well past the time he should have been relieved but Jim didn't want that. All he had to do was shake Reg Berrill who was huddled under a blanket a few feet away, but for his own reasons didn't. By remaining on sentry he had to stay awake and in staying awake he was able to concentrate on Eva.

Although his eyes were fixed on the slowly brightening ground to his front, from within his mind there was only one image, this was of a girl with auburn hair, dark eyes, moist lips and a golden-tanned skin. For the last few weeks he had thought of little else. At the end of the day's training he would quickly change into civilian clothes and run to the main road five miles away, to hitch hike on to Episkopi and the girl.

At dusk just as the rain began, 8 Platoon set off following a yellow clay track upwards into the Troodos. The scheme went according to plan, collecting the guide and assaulting the shepherds' hut, with two sections laying down blank fire. While Lance Corporal Whyte's section attacked the but with more blank rounds and thunder flashes, which simulated grenades.

The rain was torrential by then and remained so for the rest of the night. Eight Platoon could have won this inter-platoon exercise except for the handicap of their guide. He was a spare cook from HQ Company, who had been pressed into service to pass on a single message, but then instead of indicating the route was expected to march out with the platoon. This proved to be 8 Platoon's downfall, for he had only recently been discharged from hospital, after suffering a dose of pleurisy.

The cold rain drained the length of every man's body, through smocks, and shirts, to seep out of the lower denim legs over cloth puttees into boots. There was no escape and no reprieve in heavy sheets of monsoon proportion it beat down.

The stony-surfaced road climbed always upward through passes, gullies and ravines, the odd village they passed through, hugged their houses tight into the hillsides using only rocky foundations unfit for vegetable plots or vineyards. Beside the track the rain now flowed, sometimes in rushing brim-full ditches, and at others in roaring Niagara stream beds crashing from rock to rock, bulldozing its way down to the fertile Murpho plains below.

The cook, not parachute trained, therefore having never been tested mentally and physically, took it upon himself to decide he was having a relapse of pleurisy and tried to collapse. Mr Gilham ordered Jim Sinclair and Reg Berrill to keep him moving but after a mile of pushing, pulling and carrying, he dropped into the little rivulets running across the roadway.

There was nothing for it now, Gilham ordered a halt, directing everyone to find whatever shelter they could. Two days later 9 Platoon won the scheme, by completing it in the shortest time. They shaved two hours off, by climbing over the mountains instead of following tracks around. This was due to Andy Dawson, who remembered a goat trail he had once used when serving with his last regiment.

Of course Lieutenant Roe who had, because of the cold and rain given up leading and became a follower, still took the credit for winning.

Eva Spellman moaned uncontrollably arching her naked body into Sinclair's, then gripping his shoulders she twisted them both around until their roles had been reversed, so he now lay on the bed looking up at her. She with half-closed eyes slowly ground her hips into his, washing them both in hot sexual waves. Seizing her waist he began to pump upwards keeping in rhythm as Eva, now on the verge of orgasm collapsed onto the Scot's chest, groaning and crying while continuing to draw back and forth on him, increasing her pace to bring them both to a mutual peak.

Crying with pleasure she clutched his head in her arms to kiss his lips while repeating over and over, "Oh Jock I love you, I love you."

Sinclair breathing deeply between the kisses silently returned her words of love by reaching up to stroke her soft auburn hair.

The light in the room was fading, signalling to the two lovers the arrival of evening. Jim was aware of the time but tried to ignore it, wishing the day to last forever. For him this weekend had been a dream, filled with ecstasy and love.

On the Friday he had left camp early by taxi to pick Eva up, who told her parents she would be spending the weekend with friends. Before dark they arrived at Platres, a village on the southern Troodos foothills, which because of its splendid view down the vineyard slopes towards the Mediterranean, and its picturesque setting had become a minor tourist resort.

In this the mid-winter season, however, most hotels were closed or working a skeleton staff. This suited the two lovers for they had come for seclusion, the only company each wished was that of the other, and so it was to be the moment they checked in, Jim took Eva to bed where they stayed till the next afternoon, when forced to terminate their love-making temporarily through hunger. After a meal the winter sunshine caused them to stay away from their room longer than intended, for its mellow afternoon warmth drew the two on a long serene walk, through the village and over pathways in the near-by hills.

Sinclair stood at the foot of the bed buttoning his shirt while admiring Eva's body as she lay naked pretending to sleep.

"Come on hen the taxi will be here in a wee while," he warned, wishing it wasn't.

"Oh Jock I don't want to leave," protested Eva, opening her eyes to stretch her body. "Let's go back tomorrow morning."

"Not a chance," replied Sinclair. "You would be in bother with your folks and I'd end up in the digger."

The girl didn't answer she knew he was right, instead she watched as he sat on the edge of the bed lacing his shoes. Deliberately she reached for his hand to place it on her breast, holding it there until Jim's fingers instinctively gripped the untanned surface. Eva pressed his hand harder then began to rotate it so as to stimulate herself with the friction on the nipple. Sinclair turned to watch, despite his awareness of the time he also became aroused. His hand now no longer powered by Eva's, continued to revolve slowly around the pale mound centred on her gold tanned body.

"Jim, just once more?" she asked unable to suppress the desire that triggered her plea. Sinclair didn't answer, captured in silence by Eva's naked beauty, and the unconstrained desire spreading from the hardened nipple moving against the palm of his hand. Turning to

lower his head he took hold of her thighs placing his lips and tongue amongst her darkened pubic hair.

As the taxi turned out of the hotel entrance to begin the downhill journey to the coast, Eva clutching Sinclair's arm watched the building receding into the night. Then resting her head tight against his shoulder she whispered so the Cypriot driver couldn't hear.

"Jim, let's come back, soon."

Several hours were needed to embark the Battalion and all its married families. This normally involved much time anyway, but because there was no jetty at Limassol everyone had to be ferried aboard by lighters.

The move had begun for some, very early in the morning, for quarters and stores had to be handed over with baggage details and fatigue parties parading at dawn. It took until late afternoon to lift over nine hundred people from the camp and homes scattered around the town, onto the modern, but last troopship still in service. She was all new and bright, but a white elephant, for commissioned into service under a year ago she was soon to be sold off due to redundancy caused by the speed of newer range of passenger aircraft.

The highlight of the afternoon was a farewell fly past by three Hastings from the RAF squadron, who had so loyally supplied the means for the battalion to parachute while on the island. None of the soldiers were much bothered about the fly past, until on their second run they unloaded hundreds of paper streamers that turned out to be toilet rolls. On discovering this the ship erupted as the Paratroopers screaming and shouting waved their arms and berets in the air in appreciation of this unconventional gesture.

On sailing westward the passengers travelled with mixed emotions. Relief if you were single and had spent most of the last three years with the battalion; regret if you were married like Sam and Beth Kyle, who had just left a dream bungalow; and longing if, like Dave Urwin, you had realized what a splendid island Cyprus was.

Jim Sinclair left with nothing but joy in his heart, for he, after a month's separation, was on his way back to Eva. For they had been wrenched apart by her father, who on discovering their involvement with each other had sent his daughter back to her grandmother's in Camberley. The father wasted no time, for with a word to someone at Nicosia movements, he had a ticket for Eva within twenty-four hours.

The first Sinclair knew was a telephone call by her to the guard room, where it turned out, he was on guard. It took him just over an hour and a half to talk the guard Commander into letting him get a

relief, changing clothes with Billy Kennedy, who had been on his way out the gate for a ride in one of the town's brothels, and to run, then hitch hike across to Episkopi.

Once there he and Eva walked through the cool night down to the Happy Valley Sports' Ground, then through the tunnel under the cliffs to the cove that was Episkopi beach. There they said goodbye to each other silently, as lovers vowing to each that they would not be kept apart.

On a warm cloudless evening in March 1962 with a rosy sunset reflecting off the snow crown of Mount Olympus the 5th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, said goodbye to Limassol and Cyprus.

Farewell, Nick's Bar, Hero Square, Ozo and Keo beer, the taxis who were forever having Paratroopers running off without paying and the camp latrines where nights with blankets over shoulders were spent during doses of the runs. And farewell, Peter Falconer, Bob Warne and Dick Escott, who thought it would be a good idea to rob a bank, but got themselves caught trying to steal the getaway car. They were at present serving two years on a labour gang, building roads somewhere in the mountains.

On the third days' sailing, Colonel Scott received a bombshell of a signal, informing the battalion that because the 2nd Battalion families had to remain in their quarters there would not be enough accommodation to house all of 5 Para's families in Aldershot.

Of course this fact was known in England months before, but kept a secret until all quarters in Cyprus had been vacated. If this news had been leaked beforehand many of the wives would not have left their Limassol houses. Of course the Army understanding this action would have been taken, decided the only course left open to them was to play it dirty.

'Tuck' Friar carried only one suitcase from the ship into the Southampton Customs' Hall, the rest of the luggage he left behind for his wife and two daughters to struggle with. His reason was not one of laziness, but because of the contents of his suitcase, in which were two thousand cigarettes and five bottles of brandy.

Friar knew he was taking a chance, but the Sergeant had a plan. On approaching the long wooden-topped inspection counters Friar looked down at his six-year-old son to say, "Start crying." The boy not sure what was said, looked up replying, "What?"

Friar speaking out the corner of his mouth repeated his request. "I said start crying."

“Don’t want to,” came back the youngster’s answer.

‘Tuck’ transferring the suitcase to his left hand, cuffed his son on the side of the head.

“What’s that for?” The boy demanded holding his ear.

“Never mind, when I say cry you start fucking crying,” emphasizing his point by slapping him three more times.

This did the trick for willing or unwilling the son was now crying, while doing his best to kick his father’s legs. ‘Tuck’ grabbed him by the collar, holding the lad off, but at the same time dragging him towards the counter, the Customs’ Official eyeing this father and son squabble as it approached.

“I don’t care what your mother promised you, you little bleeder you’re not getting it,” shouted Friar, fighting his son off with one hand, while trying to lift the suitcase, not very successfully onto the counter with the other.

The Customs’ Official watched for some seconds then without a word waved the Sergeant on. Friar pretending to be far too occupied with his traumatic son merely nodded acknowledgement of the gesture, quickly dragging his boy by the scruff of the neck through the exit door.

There he released the still crying youngster, while once again slapping him on the side of his head accompanied by a single command. “Shut up!”

Through a clear night sky a thousand feet above the north German plains, flying at staggered levels, droned thirty odd aircraft of RAF Transport Command.

Within these machines the bulk of the 5th Battalion and attached arms from the brigade grappled under cramped conditions to fit their weapon container to parachute harnesses. This was the part of parachuting detested by everyone. Once given the order to fit equipment each stick had to tussle and fight for elbow room which would allow them the space to eventually stand with their heavy containers hanging from their front. This done the agony would then begin.

If the RAF dispatchers got the time right this could be limited to an acceptable ache. If not, the pain brought on by the effort of standing under the weight of two parachutes and the 60 to 120 pound container, combined with the mental strain of awaiting the danger of a night parachute descent, tended to generate an atmosphere of

apprehensive tension.

The men in Dave Urwin's Beverley aircraft had been standing, awaiting the green light for the half an hour, and now they, like the rest were sweating and cursing, swaying on their static lines, which most were now clutching with both hands. As heavy as his load was and as understandably aggravated as he was because of it, he was relatively lucky. For the contents of his container, Bren gun, blank ammo, three days' rations and his equipment, only amounted to 80 pounds.

Others aboard the plane like the Mortars, Machine guns and Signals Platoon personnel were up in the region of 120 pounds. They, after thirty minutes of standing in their stick order crushed against one another, fighting to retain balance in an aircraft that bobbed and weaved about the sky, were practically numb with pain and fatigue.

At last the dispatchers opened the doors which eased the discomfort of the parachutist to some extent with gusts of cold air. When the command 'Action Stations' was given, Urwin watched through the eerie artificial gloom of the red night vision lights as the first dozen or so of the twin sticks shuffled forward.

The rest remained still for this few extra metres was just not enough to give space for everyone. All eyes, at least of those that could still raise their heads were now fixed on the dual red and green lights above each door. As the red flashed on, a grateful cry rose from the men, followed by comments that were almost pleas.

"Thank Christ!"

"Now for Jesus sake let me out of here!"

"Where's that fucking green!"

Simultaneously, as the red winked off, the green light came on. Followed instantly by both dispatchers shouting, "Green on — go!"

With this command the first men should have sprung through the exit doors, but because they were Signallers or Support Company detachments and carrying mammoth loads they lamely fell or tumbled over the sill. With relief and more cheering the sticks began to move slowly at first but as gaps appeared, with more haste. Dave Urwin turned the angle at the door to square himself for that final step out into the night, then with a shove from his rear foot as he reached the step he was out. The cold blast of air which carried him sideways down the slipstream was outweighed tenfold by the relief of the painful weight that had been causing him such torture.

Looking up he saw his canopy deploy then snap past him down the

slipstream like a whip, quickly he checked around him anxious that no one was about to collide into him, then another sharp glance downwards prior to lowering his container. As yet he could still not make out the ground below, but was not taking the chance of landing with the 80 pounds of weapon and equipment still strapped to his body. Feeling below the reserve parachute he confirmed the location of the carrying hooks, then with the palms of his hands on the release arms he pushed down. The tug as the 80 pounds load reached the end of the container rope was a fair jar, displacing his harness slightly to one side. However, this passed almost unnoticed for upmost in his mind at that moment was, where was he about to land.

Thanks to a high overcast of cloud, visibility of the ground was practically nil. In the distance were lights from farms and villages but from the area of what should have been the DZ was only varying shades of darkness.

With seconds of his descent left Urwin could at last make out bumps and folds of what he thought was an undulating field, too late he realized it was a forest. With eyes closed and arms tucked across his face he crashed through the top branches, to jerk to a halt, hanging upside down out of reach of any branches. With the blood rushing to his head, forty feet off the ground, struggling to regain an upright position Urwin would hardly have believed that he was one of the fortunate.

Lance Corporal Sam Kyle on exiting his aircraft found himself in a collision with another parachutist, resulting in entanglement for both. Kyle came out the worst, his parachute being nothing more than a bundle of ‘washing’ ensnared amongst the other’s rigging lines. With both men’s body weight and container load now being suspended by the one canopy their rate of descent was rapid. Sam realizing they were dropping dangerously fast shouted up to the other man ten feet above him.

“Pull your reserve,” this he had to repeat several times as the lad had only just recently joined the battalion from the depot and was suffering a mild case of shock over his predicament. As the reserve canopy began to snake upwards feeling its way past the main parachute, Kyle kept firing instructions aware that he was directing the actions that would save them both from injury or worse.

“Feed those rigging lines out. Now shake it, help the canopy deploy.”

Once the white reserve shute had fully inflated he still kept a useful dialogue going, mainly to keep the other man occupied and minimize

the chance of him panicking.

“Push down on the lift webs,” he shouted. “Keep your reserve flying to one side of the main.” He now noticed their rate of descent had slowed but was taking no risks.

“I’m going to get rid of my container to lighten our load,” he again shouted.

“OK, OK.” Came the nervous reply.

“I’ll get rid of mine too.”

“Will yah fuck!” hollered back Kyle. “If that thing hits me, it will likely carry me into the deck with it; you keep the fucking thing on.”

Reaching down the side of his harness Sam felt for the web strap of the quick release buckle on his container rope, giving it a sharp tug he fed it free of his leg strap, then with both palms he pushed down on the release hooks to watch as the bulky weapon container slipped away into the darkness below. Suddenly the parachutist above him began to shout a distraught warning.

“I can’t see, I can’t see ” Looking up Kyle saw the man becoming engulfed in his collapsed canopy that was now trying to inflate itself and was beginning to billow about in small bulges of khaki. This crisis was instantly nipped in the bud by both men crashing through the trees of the same forest Urwin was dangling in.

The broad weaving line that Billy Kennedy could make out below him had no real significance until too late he recognized it for what it was. In a confused flap he began several different stages of his emergency procedure for entering water, all at once and completing none.

It wasn’t until he had actually sank below the surface to find himself being dragged down towards the river bed, that he got the sequence of removing the reserve parachute and turning his quick release harness box right. As the securing lugs fell away he clawed upwards struggling for the surface and air. However, the current that carried his parachute rigging lines and canopy away from him was becoming a death trap for others.

For as they fought to live amongst this nylon tangle they were either anchored by a container they failed to jettison while the river’s flow gently wrapped them up in the lines, or on releasing the container found themselves drifting under water to become ever increasingly interwoven within an inescapable knot.

On digging his fingers into the dark muddy earth of the river bank,

Kennedy began to thank every God he could think of for allowing him to live. Then screaming with rage he scrambled out onto the grass to rip his steel helmet off, cursing skywards, damning all the blue jobbed RAF crab bastards that ever flew an aircraft.

What should have been a battalion group night parachute assault in support of one of NATO's mock exercises was rapidly turning into a shambles. The reason for this and why people were hanging in trees and drowning in rivers was one of misjudgement.

The Pathfinders who had jumped earlier in the evening and should have marked a large DZ safe from any obstacles were dropped short of where they should have been. The Commander of the party, under pressure and pushed for time, decided to lay his marker lights where he was, hoping to bring the battalion in, if not in the right spot at least together. This decision as it proved was to be the wrong one, which others were now paying for.

The majority of the battalion were able to land safely, in fields, clearings or on the river bank. These men with their equipment on their backs and weapons in hands were now feeling about singularly or in small parties around the countryside trying to find Company and Sub Unit RVs.

The rest in assorted difficulties attempted to deal with what it was in assorted ways. Those still hanging in trees made individual efforts or waited.

Bob MacIntyre hanging suspended in mid-air unable to see the ground below him first released his container. It sounded to strike the ground quickly so he decided to open his reserve parachute, feed it out below him and then climb down its lines. It was a good idea until he found himself climbing inside the canopy, with no choice remaining, but to spend the rest of the night there, like a mouse in a sock.

Helpful 'Tuck' Friar seeing a man hanging only head high off the ground shouted at him to slip his harness and drop down. Three others nearby, but higher up believing he meant them did the same. One broke his back, another both ankles and the third received a compound fracture of the right lower leg. This was Dave Urwin who, overcome with pain, felt the broken shin bone jutting through his pants' leg and immediately went into shock.

Dougie Abbot rested on his hands and knees at the river's edge recovering his breath. Although landing only a few metres from shore, nevertheless his struggle not to drown had been a gallant one. Unable to free himself of his harness he had fought inch by inch, going under

repeatedly but always surfacing to thrash and punch his way through water and parachute to finally reach the bank. After several minutes he rose to his knees to unbuckle the parachute that still trailed behind him back into the water. Suddenly a large silent dark mass appeared directly above him, Dougie never saw the heavy drop platform that crushed him to death.

This new menace claimed only the one life, but it did compound an already calamitous situation. The parachutists at first ignored the planes that droned through the night sky above them, until they heard the crash and thud of platforms landing. Then a mild terror set in, with hearts beating and heads back, looking up all trying to determine the flight path of the heavy drop Beverleys, everyone's eyes searching for the tell-tale mass of blackness descending out of the dark.

As one platform crashed through the wood where Dave Urwin lay, impaling itself on a broken stump, those still hanging in their harness began to jerk and dance like puppets, trying to see up through the trees above.

The aftermath on the DZ went on for a number of days. This involved the recovery and salvaging of equipment and the accounting of all the soldiers who jumped that evening. Not an easy matter for some aircraft had turned back without dropping, others had dispatched only part of their cargo.

It wasn't until the exercise was stopped for a day while the battalion took a head count, that the Authorities could confirm no one else was missing. The final figure of those dead was six. A lot of preparation had gone into this disaster, for it was the first large scale exercise 5 Para had been involved in since re-joining 16 Para Brigade, six months earlier.

After a month's leave, they spent three weeks settling in, acclimatizing themselves to the Aldershot environment. Then it was a constant build-up of platoon, Company and battalion schemes, working towards the culmination of this German exercise. The return to the UK. had not been all that joyous, especially for the married families. Some, a small number were given quarters, but most had to move in with relatives or friends the length and breadth of Britain.

Sam and Beth Kyle were fortunate in as much as accommodation was found for them in Jerome Square. This was a two bedroom upstairs flat in the ancient brick-building adjacent to the depot, that Dave Urwin had originally mistaken for other barracks. This had been a justifiable error for its plain inhospitable appearance hardly expressed the characteristics of most people's idea of a home. Perhaps

if the inside had been well lit and modernized the quarters could have been acceptable by those who had to live in them — but this was not so.

Beth Kyle silently walked from one room to another then standing in the paint-layered brick walled livingroom-cum-diningroom she solemnly looked about. The old furniture was chipped and soiled, peppered about the walls were numerous nail holes put there by decades of past occupants. From the ceiling a lone light bulb hung by a four foot length of flex.

Sam watched his wife, wishing he could somehow apologise for bringing her into this depressing structure. Beth fought back the tears for some moments, until she thought again of the warm Cypriot bungalow, with its orange blossom fragrance drifting in through the back kitchen windows. Sam noticed the tears, but could do nothing more than place his arms around her. Beth returned his embrace, sobbing again and again.

"Oh Sam! Oh Sam!"

There was also dissatisfaction among the single members of the battalion. The long used phrase of good old Blighty soon soured, as they learned with a shock what it was like plying their trade in the UK. The rain and icy wind of Sennybridge training area, the rock-hard chalk beds of Salisbury Plain that made digging a nightmare and the waterlogged slit trenches of Otterburn Ranges. With all this to put up with, it was hard not to look on those past days in the warm eastern Mediterranean without some longing.

At the end of the first phase of the NATO exercise which lasted six days, 5 Para dragged itself into a tented camp to prepare for the next. The break would be four days, ample time for rest, re-supply, planning and briefing for the next stage, and still give everyone a night or two out in the local town. But a night out wasn't to be, at least not for the men; for them the PRI would provide a beer tent where they could drink and tell each other jump stories. The only people who were allowed to walk out were the Officers and SNCOs.

This confinement of the Junior ranks wouldn't have occurred under Colonel Scott, but he was gone now, promoted to a desk, somewhere in the War Office. His successor, a man who had spent the last five years as a Major moving pins about wall boards at various Staff jobs, had unfortunately taken the advice of the also new RSM. He, not wishing to answer for the crimes that six hundred drunken Paratroopers might commit on the near-by civilian population strongly recommended they be restricted to the camp.

The mutiny although nothing grand was inevitable. The first evening the men just grumbled, thinking their turn would be the next night. But by the third day it was plain to all that they were not to be given a night out.

Perhaps if the route taken by the Officers and SNCOs had been different the confrontation might have been avoided. For there was only one exit from the camp, and that was by way of a road either side of which were pitched the Company's two-man tents. Shortly after tea the exodus would begin, SNCOs in blazers and regimental ties, the officers in corduroy trousers and trilbies. While from both sides of the road six hundred pairs of eyes glared at them. There wasn't much the soldiers could do about it, except get drunk in the beer tent, so they did.

Later that evening the ground between the chairs and tables of the tent had become ankle-deep in beer cans. The sing-song had started tame enough, but as more and more joined in, it practically bulged the canvas walls with its volume. Because of this noise the RSM who remained in camp for a quiet drink in the Sergeants' Mess with some of his cronies, sent the BOS down to close the bar an hour early.

The BOS didn't have the chance to repeat his order to the four pay clerks who were doing the duty of barmen, before he was confronted by a score of angry men in the queue who were not about to have their drinking interrupted. He, seeing rank would be no protection backed away, pleading it wasn't his idea, but the RSM's.

With a hundred voices crying, "Fuck the RSM," he was chased out of the entrance, followed by a barrage of empty beer cans.

On hearing the BOS's report, the RSM went into a rage, storming out of the Sergeants' Mess to sort this drunken rabble out. He could have saved himself the journey for the cry within the beer tent had soon changed from, 'Fuck the RSM,' to 'Hang the RSM.'

The determined expression on his face, as he marched towards the rowdy noise soon altered to wonderment, then worry as he realized the herd spilling out of the PRI tent were after him. With chants of, 'Lynch the bastard', they swarmed up the road. Someone had cut a tent guide rope, and was holding its noosed end above his head pointing in the RSM's direction.

With only twenty metres between them he lost his nerve, turning at the run. A hundred beer cans were thrown after him, to be followed by the mob, who with whoops and yells took up the chase. At the large marquee tent that served as the Sergeants' Mess, they stopped, shouting challenges for the gutless bastard to come out. Something no

sane man would have done, and the RSM was no nutter — a fool yes — a nutter no.

Finally someone in the crowd shouted, “If you don’t come out we’ll burn you out.” Now this was something that appealed to the drunken mob, so someone did. It went up like a bomb, but not before those inside had scrambled out to hide elsewhere in the night’s darkness. Luckily, once the canvas had burned away, the interior was relatively undamaged. On seeing the mess bar stock unattended there was an almighty stampede to loot the bottles of spirits and crates of beer.

For the next couple of hours parties of drunken Paratroopers roamed the camp area singing and cheering, taking up the cry of, “‘Armpit’ Pridmore for CO.”

This spontaneous motion to take command was not Pridmore’s doing, in fact he knew nothing of the riot. For a few minutes before it had started he had staggered drunkenly out for a piss and accidentally fell into the steep-sided DTL (deep trench latrine) pit. After a couple of attempts at climbing out he gave up, to snore himself off into a painless sleep. There he remained until morning while being urinated on and worse, by those in the battalion who felt the urge.

The next evening the men were allowed out.

Someone else who was ignorant of the battalion’s riotous behaviour was Jim Sinclair. He was absent without leave that evening, 150 miles away. After breaking out of camp it had taken him a day and a half to find the address of an Officer’s quarter on the outskirts of Padorborne. Having walked and hitch hiked through two nights and a day he finally stood unshaven, untidy and foot sore opposite the three-storey house he had come so far to find.

For some minutes he studied the building, hoping to glimpse the person he wished to see, until at last walking across the street to ring the house bell. Brushing a hand through his hair, aware of his scruffy appearance, but willing himself to present a cheerful front, he forced a smile onto his face before the door opened.

“Hello Eva,” he beamed as the door swung back.

Eva Spellman’s look was one of surprised bewilderment. “Oh! Hello! Hello Jock!” She stuttered, now smiling, but with one which kept fading and having to be replaced.

“I would have warned you I was coming, but I dinna know if you were still here.” Sinclair watched the girl’s face hoping to read a truthful reply from her eyes, on why she had not answered his letters

for the last four months.

“Oh yes Jim I’m sorry but I’ve been away in Bavaria for a month, and now I have a job as a secretary at my uncle’s Regimental Headquarters, it’s just taken up so much of my time.”

He knew she was lying but its realization failed to register to any great degree for her nearness was beginning to dispel his doubts and worries of the last months. The plain cotton dress she wore formed to her narrow waist and hips which highlighted the rest of her familiar trim figure. Without breathing deeply he could smell the fragrance of her perfume that had been ever present during their long sessions of love-making in Cyprus, and which was now compelling him to reach forward to grip her dark reddish hair and pull her lips to his.

Aware this doorstep situation would shortly become an embarrassment she stepped onto the porch closing the door behind her, then taking Sinclair by the arm she started down the steps.

“Let’s go for a walk Jim, I can’t ask you inside, my aunt has guests. It’s an officers’ wives get-together.”

As they walked, Eva told him what had been happening to her since leaving Cyprus. But without giving a reason why she had been sent from her grandmother’s in Camberley to stay with her uncle and aunt in Germany.

Jim didn’t ask either — there was no need, with Camberley only a thirty minute bus ride from Aldershot. He was disappointed but not surprised she had been moved before he returned from Cyprus.

A short distance down the street they turned into a small park, where Eva guided him to a plain wooden bench. After several minutes of more small talk, she finally found the courage to tell him she was now engaged to be married.

Jim without realizing it released her hand to lean back on the bench, pushing his own hands deep into the pockets of his quilted anorak jacket.

“Jim,” Eva repeated, “Did you hear me I said I’m going to be married.”

Sinclair momentarily on the verge of making a fool of himself by begging her not to and plea instead for her to marry him, caught himself just in time.

“I’m pleased for you Eva, what’s he like?”

Eva, expecting any answer but this, couldn’t speak at first. Then with a surprised smile quickly replied, “Oh he’s nice, he’s a Captain in

my uncle's office, we met when I got the job."

Then putting her hand on Sinclair's knee, "That's why I stopped writing Jim. I couldn't tell you about it, and hoped once I stopped you would forget me."

"That's alright love, if it had been me I would probably have done the same." Then standing up, "Come on I'll walk you back, I'm in a hurry anyway. I've got a duty back with the battalion in a couple of hours," he lied.

At the gate he stopped, still keeping his hands in his jacket pockets, but with a smile said, "Well I'll say goodbye Eva. I wish you all the best with this bloke of yours."

Eva believing she had made a painless break leaned forward and kissed Sinclair on his stubbled cheeks.

"Thanks Jock, I do still like you a lot. I hope we see each other again."

"Aye! Aye!" replied the Scot. "Me too."

He watched as she hurried up the steps to pause in the doorway, smiling and waving farewell. Sinclair returned her goodbye gesture with a smile and a nod while enraged hatred burned within him.

"You bitch, you fucking English bitch," he repeated to himself.

Four hours later he was picked up by the MPs for drunkenness and causing an affray in Gordies Bar outside the main gate of Sennylager camp. For once drunk he had picked a fight with three RASC drivers.

On being returned to the battalion he was charged by Lance Corporal Kyle for being absent without leave. Sam had no choice for he was on duty as the COS. The Company Commander held orders that afternoon remanding Sinclair for COs for the charges were too serious to be dealt with by anyone else. On the battalion's return to Aldershot Jim was given fourteen days' nick.

In the space of a year in which the 5th Battalion had returned from Cyprus, Charlie Company through normal moves had changed a number of the old faces.

Major Hanning had been posted to Brigade HQ, Lieutenant Chuter went off to do his stint as a recruit platoon Commander in the depot, and Lieutenant Gilham had taken over his appointment with Support Company as the Anti-Tank Commander. Of the officers only Roe remained.

Of the SNCOs Colour Sergeant Allander and Sergeant Friar had also left, Allander as a Sandhurst Instructor and Friar for a tour as a Permanent Staff Instructor with one of the TA Battalions. Tony Knight was still the CSM but he too was shortly to leave.

This constant moving of the officers and SNCOs was all part of the Army system. Normally they held a post for two years, then were either promoted or posted. In this way those with command appointments were constantly rotating and climbing in rank, gaining the knowledge of their trade, while broadening their base within the structure of the regiment.

The faces of the men were also changing through de-mob, promotion and block postings to HQ or Support Companies. However, 'C' Company had not changed all that much, most of the old sweats were still there, mainly because everyone was now on a six year engagement.

One person who had left the Company, now signed on as a regular, was Bob MacIntyre and pleased about it he was, for his new job was driving a Land Rover with the MT Platoon. Bob liked driving, for one thing he no longer had to march anywhere, and it also gave him a degree of independence. Like the detail he was on at the moment, taking the battalion's Second in Command down to Larkhill camp to attend a training co-ordinating conference.

On stopping in front of the Headquarters building the Major half opened his door before giving full instructions to him.

"I'll be about an hour MacIntyre, I suggest you go find yourself a cup of tea." Then pointing with a downward finger, "But be back here at 1100 hours to collect me, understood?"

"Yes Sir," replied MacIntyre slipping the clutch into first gear in preparation for his search for that cup of tea. He found it in the local Garrison NAAFI. But had to wait a fair while to be served because of the long queue of resident soldiers and WRACs. Finally with a cup in one hand, and his canvas-covered vehicle work ticket in the other, he threaded his way across the crowded room to a vacant chair. The one he chose was at a table occupied by four WRACs.

"Excuse me love?" he asked of a pretty blonde, seated at the table, "Is anyone sitting here?"

The girl gave him a fleeting smile, then shaking her head in little sharp movements replied, "No."

Bob could have sat down, drunk his tea and kept quiet, but instead he decided to make polite conversation with the girls. It was harmless

enough, just asking them what job they did, what was the camp like and where they went in the evening.

This helped pass the time, hardly noticing the blonde was doing most of the answering. At least not until he felt a shove in the back of his shoulder. Bob looked around half-expecting to see someone he knew, but instead found himself being glared at by another WRAC, this one a tall gangly red-head with close-cropped hair, who unlike most of the girls preferred to wear trousers and boots.

“She’s mine,” she said nodding at the blonde. “So keep your nose out.”

Bob stared back for a second not too sure he heard right. Then replied, “Ya what?”

“I said she’s mine, so you keep your chatting up to yourself mate.”

This time a finger was being jabbed in his direction. MacIntyre looked at the blonde who was now studying her tea cup, unable to hide the embarrassed shame she now felt. At last the penny dropped for MacIntyre, suddenly realizing he was being warned off from interfering in some sort of lesbian association.

Turning back to the red head he angrily jerked his thumb over his shoulder telling her, “Push off you stupid cow.” Then reaching for his cup he tried to drink. This action was stopped causing him to spill half the cup onto his lap by another push in the back.

“Right, you and me outside,” came a challenge from the red-head.

Bob sat for a moment, holding his cup, wiping spilled tea from his chin. Then standing up, placed his belt and beret on top of the vehicle work ticket and without a word led the way to the door. There he halted to hold it open for his female opponent.

With a false bow he smiled, extending his hand towards the steps, gallantly allowing her first through the doorway. With a contemptuous snort of air from her nostrils showing MacIntyre what she thought of his phoney chivalry, she started out of the door, but didn’t get far.

Bob’s right fist struck the side of her jaw driving her head against the framework, then his left dug into the girl’s kidneys while his right again this time full in the face, breaking her nose and several front teeth. Grabbing her hair he crashed the face down onto his up-coming knee, then as she fell, finished her off with a kick to the left breast, tumbling her to the bottom of the steps, blood streaming from her nose and mouth, apparently unconscious.

MacIntyre turned back into the building — his tea was getting cold!

The mob that had suddenly arrived outside the depot guardroom at first appeared to be menacing, which was why the Corporal of the guard now had his six men deployed on the steps with fixed bayonets.

The incident had started over an attack on one of the guard by a member of 5 Para's Machine Gun Platoon. He, on his way back to the barracks after getting drunk at the NAAFI club, took it into his head to take the sentry's rifle.

The guard being bigger and sober knocked him unconscious, then dragged him back to the guard room, where the guard Commander placed him in a cell to sleep it off. However, a crowd of his mates got to hear of the indignity of his plight and decided to spring him. One in particular, Sid Reed, a fat but muscular, mouthy, hard case from the Mortar Platoon, was doing all the rabble rousing.

Standing with the fifty or so would-be jail breakers behind him, he was well into his stride of dictating one-way terms. "If youse bastards don't hand over our mate, we're going to take him and beat you bloody doing it."

The guard Commander, standing on the porch just behind his six half-circled guards, tried to bluff with an air of authority, while playing for time, hoping his Second in Command within the guard room was having some success in phoning the Brigade MPs.

"If I was you," he began, "I would have a think about what you're doing. Every one of you is pushing for a tour in Coly."

This threat of the glass house at Colchester merely washed over their heads, to be answered by a half-brick thrown at the Corporal.

On seeing the missile sail against the guard room wall, Reed — Christ-like — held his hand up to quell the crowd, giving the guard Commander one last chance. Stepping forward he again challenged the guard to release the unjustly accused drunken slob now asleep in the cells. Slurring his words from himself having too much to drink, which was probably the real reason why he was there, he now began to point at individual sentries.

"This is your last chance you bastards, we know your faces, and if you don't give us our mate we'll come looking for you fuckers."

The young recruits were finding the situation unnerving anyway, but this threat of Reed's made some of them waver and look to each other for support. But not Tam McSweeny he had had enough of this fat gobby bastard doing all the threatening.

McSweeny was a pint-sized Glaswegian Scot from Govan; there, you don't tell anybody you're coming —you do the business by getting in first. Stepping forward he drove his bayonet in three quick lunges into Reed's face.

Reed fell back, blood gushing onto his shirt, then seeing McSweeny still advancing towards him turned in a blind panic to run, followed by the rest of the brave mob.

This was not an end, for six weeks later McSweeny was posted to 5 Para. This resulting in a vendetta being waged between him and Reed that only ended some years later with one's death.

Dave Urwin sat at a small table in the Havelock a half-finished pint of Guinness in front of him. He had been there over an hour, hoping to be joined by someone he knew, for he was bored and lonely.

It had been six months since he had dropped out of that German tree, giving himself a compound fracture of the lower right leg, but even now he was still under treatment. He had to spend a month in hospital in Germany, before being shipped back to the Cambridge Hospital for another two months, then off to Roehampton Hospital where they specialized in bone fractures like his for a further month.

At last he was allowed to go home on sick leave for two weeks, then back to Aldershot where he rejoined 'C' Company. But because he was far from fit and having to report to the Cambridge daily for physiotherapy he was put in the Company Office to help the clerk push his paper around.

That was until last week when the Company had to move down to RAF Boscombe Down on Salisbury Plain to provide parachutists for jump trials on a new aircraft that was coming into service, the Argosy. Because he had to stay near the Cambridge Hospital Urwin found himself re-employed at Battalion HQ doing little more than making cups of tea for the Orderly Room Staff.

"Hello Paddy, why so glum?" Dave hadn't seen the slim, blonde girl come through the door beside him until she spoke.

"Oh hello Flo, yeah that's because I'm twenty-one today, and no one's baked me a cake," he jokingly lied.

"Oh ya, well you don't look a day over ten," she joked back with a smile then enquired, "You on your own then?"

"Aye," Dave replied. "The boys are away."

"Well if that's the case I'll keep you company. Do you mind?"

“Flo love, be my guest,” invited Urwin patting the seat beside him. “What will you have?”

Flo held up a hand, declining the offer of a drink replying instead, “The first one’s on me, what are you drinking?”

Urwin drained his glass handing it up to her. “Ta Flo, that’s a Guinness.”

Dave watched Flo Bascombe at the bar as she waited to be served, a twinge of sexual desire beginning to germinate within him.

Farnham Flo as she was known, was a legend in her own time. Not yet thirty, attractive, pleasant in conversation, she had just one weakness — men — Flo was the brigade bike. Two or three evenings a week she would come into Aldershot, have a couple of drinks in one of the pubs, then at the end of the night select someone she fancied — inviting him to buy a bottle of wine. They would catch the bus together back to her place to polish off its contents followed by breakfast in the morning.

Some would call her a whore but she was never that, Flo Boscombe always bought her round, and always gave as well as received in her bed. Those who had done the trip to Farnham by bus with a wine bottle clutched in their hands never spoke unkindly of Flo, she was a great kid and a terrific grind.

Having sat down Flo held her glass up smiling at Urwin.

“Happy Birthday Paddy,” Dave looked at her in puzzlement for a second then realizing the joke raised his pint to his lips also smiling.

“Oh aye, cheers,” then gagging when caught in mid-swallow by her inquisitious question.

“Paddy do you fancy wine?”

CHAPTER 12

Ship me somewhere east of Suez,

where the best is like the worst.

Where there aren't no Ten Commandments,

an' a man can raise a thirst:

Rudyard Kipling

The air's hot, a stale stench wafted through the Britannia's door, bringing a sour cringe to Sam Kyle's face as he waited to disembark. It was almost two years to the day that 5 Para had left Bahrain, and now they were back, to begin their first tour as Britain's watchdog in the Gulf.

The 2nd Battalion had served only six months, but now that a permanent camp had been built, all following formations would each be involved in nine month stints.

As Kyle and the rest of the passengers, who were mostly 'C' Company walked across the concrete runway of Muharraq airfield, he looked about him, fixing old landmarks in his mind.

The one overpowering factor he remembered so well, and wished he could escape from, but couldn't, was the smell — Bahrainies had been using the shore line around the town as their toilet for centuries, and although they were immune to its repugnant odour, strangers had to suffer for many weeks before becoming immune themselves.

The camp, thankfully was sited five miles out in the desert, where the air, if not fresher was at least free of the foul stink of the coast. The accommodation was first class, nothing more than their old friends the shiny Twynys, but they all had the very necessary air-conditioners, which cooled the interior to a comfortable temperature.

As well as the billets, the messes, the cook house, the guard room and a patch of levelled hard-packed sand called a drill square, there were also some amenities, a NAAFI, with a shop and a reading room supervised by a WVS lady — and wonder of wonders a swimming pool. On camp by lease and contract, and run by Pakistanis was also a barber shop, a tailors and the ever present Chaimen.

These Chaimen — like soldiers, were subject to postings by their firm and tended to move about, as Billy Kennedy found out five

minutes after setting foot in the camp. For from a hundred metres away an Asian voice hailed him with the demand, “You! You! Mickey Mouse you owe me four pounds six and four pence.”

Billy, who had given the name of the Walt Disney character instead of his own, to be entered in the Chai-man’s tick book next to his Company number, had sneaked out of Cyprus without paying his bill, and now almost two years later and fifteen hundred miles from the scamper he was well and truly collared.

The camp was a large one, for not only did it contain 5 Para, there was also the attached elements of the Brigade, that made up a battalion group. All in all, a thousand men were to share together the next nine months of hot days and warm Persian Gulf nights.

Compared to Cyprus, Bahrain as a posting, was to prove for most one of celibacy and denial, for being a Muslim state, alcohol and women were not to be freely found locally. Any drinking would have to be done in NAAFIs belonging to the Forces, or if you were able at the oil companies’ families complex, Awali, four miles away.

This ultra-housing estate was similar to the one 5 Para had known in Kuwait, with their clubs, lounges, shopping centres and swimming pool. Here also was the most likely place that one would have of latching on to a bunk up. As for the average squaddie, unsatisfied with masturbation, the sole outlet available was the one and only brothel on Bahrain, this the Indian staffed and run, ‘House of Jasmine’, where the unmedically supervised girls of assorted shapes and ages hired out their private parts.

But Awali was where bored, oversexed white women, with husbands who spent long periods away on oil rigs were to be found. Of course this was limited mainly to the officers and SNCOs, and a few of the more handsome Toms, who could ply a smooth line of patter.

On the training side, the battalion was fortunate in once again changing Commanding Officers, this time, for a man who knew what was expected of someone controlling a body of professional soldiers. His policy was a simple one, ‘keep the men active and training hard, in this way taking their minds off the evillest of all soldiers’ enemies — time.’

The first order he gave was to scatter the Companies, one back into RAF billets at the airfield, as the stand-by Company ready to move at two hours’ notice.

Another across onto the shores of the Trucial Coast on the Arabian mainland, three hundred miles away, just outside the town of Sharjah. There they lived in tents and it was regarded as the battalion’s holiday

camp.

Further inland a third Company, sited their camp next to the depot of the Force that served as the local Army. They were the Trucial Oman Scouts, an Arab formation drawn from all the surrounding Gulf States, but also staffed with selected British officers and NCOs seconded to them. The role of this Company was to show the flag, in half platoon size patrols, the men would spend two or three weeks at a time leisurely moving through the mountains and wadis, touring the water holes and villages, showing the tribesmen that a disciplined British Force was now, if need be, on hand.

The fourth Company remained in the camp to assist HQ Company, and the supporting arms of the brigade, with the endless but necessary fatigues and camp guards. With the three rifle Companies and Support Company, rotating these locations every month, it began to turn into an active and enjoyable tour.

It had only been a blink of Bob McIntyre's eyes nothing more, or so it seemed to him, but that had been enough. The old half-blind Arab beggar, who stepped into the path of his Land Rover, died within a few seconds of being hit.

"The fucking wog," cursed MacIntyre, braking to a halt. "The idiot wanted to commit suicide."

Then running back to stand helpless over the crumpled, dirty rag-clad form as it lay in the road. Although it was almost dusk in the street, most shops were still open with many people about, but few bothered to take an interest in the accident. Those that did were watching Bob to see what he would do.

Just as he was about to go looking for an ambulance or the Authorities, a policeman ambled unhurriedly down the street. MacIntyre wouldn't have been as relieved as he felt, if he had known that the first act the khaki-clad figure was about to do was to arrest him, charged with murder. Despite MacIntyre having been awake for the last 48 hours, driving during a Company exercise, and that the Arab beggar had walked straight out into the street, he was still found guilty. The Army had provided a local lawyer to represent him, but no matter how innocent a European may be, when his actions result in the death of an Arab, in the eyes of Bahrain law he must be punished. Bob was lucky, the white robed administrator of justice, sentenced him to a nominal six months' confinement.

Bahrain's jail was built of neither bricks or stone, nor were there jailers. Three miles off the north coast was a small sandy island, one

half by one quarter of a mile where no tree or bush grew. Here convicted criminals were taken to serve their time, and although unguarded, no one had ever escaped. Any vessel large or small would be without warning fired upon by police launches, should they venture within a mile of the island. As for those brave and strong enough to try and swim for the mainland, the sharks that prowled the channel as if paid bounty hunters, had never failed to get their man.

When Bob stepped ashore on the stone jetty, which was the only permanent structure on the island, he was led by his one man police escort along the beach. This was lined by ramshackle, makeshift driftwood and rag lean-tos, which were the prisoners' self-built cells. The prisoners themselves looking more like lepers than convicts, lived an existence of survival dependent on food sent to them by relatives, delivered each day by the police launch.

MacIntyre's food would be supplied by the battalion, but this point was not on his mind at the moment. As he stood in front of his assigned cell, watching the launch return to Bahrain, he pushed the fear and anxiety from his mind, allowing only the hate to remain, swearing to himself that come what may, over the next six months these black bastards were not going to make him suffer.

The door to 8 Platoon's Twynham had a burr on the sill, that gave off a distinctive squeal whenever it was opened. As Dave Urwin and Billy Kennedy slept only two beds from it, both were used to having their slumber disturbed by its periodical opening and closing. Urwin, with a single sheet draped across his waist and lower limbs, at first only opened his eyes to check the time on his watch.

But on discovering there was still an hour until reveille he quickly glanced towards the noise, curious as to who was moving about so early. Peering through the half-opened door was Tam McSweeny, who really had no business being there as he was 'B' Company.

Unknown to Urwin, McSweeny's mission was one of revenge, for he and Sid Reed had again fought the night before, with McSweeny coming out the loser, as he always did when the contest was one to one with bare fists. Now the small Glaswegian was out to even the score.

Reed, having fallen foul of Support Company's Sergeant Major found himself posted to 8 Platoon, where he now occupied a bed next to the door. McSweeny, whose eyes, like a hunting lioness had been scanning the room, narrowed as he recognized his prey in the near bed. Easing the door fully open, he entered the billet in a half crouch, stealthily taking the three steps to Reed's bedside.

As the Scot raised the pick-helve with which he intended to inflict the most heinous damage on his enemy, the sleeping man's eyes flashed open, triggered through the senses of a predator aware that he also was on the food chain. Seeing the wooden bar coming down for his head, he rolled away to the floor taking the blow on his shoulder as he went.

The next swing was delivered as he sat amongst his sheets and blankets. The shaft again missed, leaving McSweeny sprawled across the bed still holding the pick handle in both hands. This gave Reed the chance to hit back, which he did with the yell of, "You bastard!"

From his sitting position he punched a right fist into McSweeny's face. For the next few seconds both men, each holding an end of the pick handle, scratched, clawed and punched, neither able to gain an advantage over the other.

Finally McSweeny seeing his initial surprise had been lost, broke from the tussle, bolting out the door. Reed now in possession of the pick handle scrambled to his feet to follow in naked hot pursuit.

Urwin who had been watching the two combatants, as one watches an aircraft about to crash, in powerless amazement, turned his head to see Kennedy opposite him had also been watching.

"Did ya see that Billy?" he asked, more as a statement than a question.

"Yah, funny," replied Kennedy without a hint of humour, "Sid's never booked an early call before."

The Company base camp at Manama was intended to be just that, a cluster of tents where the patrol groups returned to for supplies and a few days rest. Of those who remained in the camp, there was only about a dozen, Company HQ drivers, cooks, and signallers who operated a radio link back to the battalion on Bahrain. It was because of the radio, that 'C' Company found themselves making a change in the routine programme.

All patrols had been cancelled a few days earlier, and now with the arrival that afternoon of the last half-platoon returning to camp, the Officer Commanding was about to address the Company. The men waited on parade for their Major to emerge from his tent. When 'Bungalow Head' Blander did appear it was in his normal slow moving, chin high, facetious manner.

Company Sergeant Major Allander, who had just returned to the battalion called the Company to attention, then saluting, reported it

present.

‘Bungalow Head’, he was called that because he had nothing upstairs either, returned the salute by flapping his right wrist somewhere in the direction of his forehead. Then talking in his distinctive downwards attitude, told his Sergeant Major to stand the Company at ease.

Facing his command he began, “Gentlemen,” which he always called them but never meant, “I have just recently received a signal from Battalion HQ informing me that the 5th Battalion is to carry out a Company size parachute operation, somewhere in East Africa.”

Then pausing to allow his words to sink in to the minds of his dim-witted soldiers, he gathered himself for the dramatic punch line. “‘C’ Company! We have been chosen to accomplish that operation.”

Then turning to Sergeant Major Allander, confirmed to everyone within hearing as to just how big a twit he was. “Sergeant Major I want everyone in the company to sharpen their bayonets.”

‘Bungalow’ was a fat, useless, lazy wanker and well-deserving of his nickname. On joining the Company over a year earlier, he had openly stated that he had just spent his twenties marching, and now that he was a Major intended to spend his thirties riding, which he promptly did.

No matter what the Company was involved in or where it went on exercise, ‘Bungalow’ never left his Land Rover, and even on occasions had the cheek to chastise the men for falling behind while he rode past them in his vehicle. A born leader of men was our ‘Bungalow’.

As it turned out he never commanded the operation for this was cancelled, but not before the Company found itself in Aden camped beside Khormaksar airfield. This move was the beginning of the end of 5 Para’s cushy posting on Bahrain.

Shortly after the East African operation was cancelled events up country in one of the Aden States, bordering South Yemen, began to demand that punitive action be taken. Over the last few months, reports began to come in, stating that armed soldiers were operating inside Aden’s border with Yemen.

So as to get an accurate report on this activity, an intelligence patrol was parachuted in. Of the eight who jumped, five returned with the information that the newly formed Nasser-backed Communist regime of Yemen, was inciting the border tribesmen to rebellion. Of the other three, they had been shot during an encounter, decapitated, and their heads paraded on poles around the streets of Sana, the

Capital of South Yemen.

The Company sat in an RAF briefing room, chatting amongst themselves, while waiting for their new Company Commander to put them in the picture. For the last few days rumours had been flying thick and fast, all confirming they were moving up country. But just what they were to do there, they couldn't agree.

As a side door opened, Ron Allander brought the Company to attention by ordering them to, "Sit up." The man first through the door was the new OC, Major 'Knocker' Griffin, a stocky broad-shouldered man with blond hair that was receding through premature baldness.

His sport was rugby, which when not playing, he would talk about endlessly to whomever would listen. 'Knocker' was also a bit of an eccentric, although having spent fifteen years in the Army, he didn't really take it serious from a professional point of view. He liked the life and companionship of the Officers' Mess, and the opportunities it offered of playing rugby, but that was all.

As he stepped up onto a small stage to face the Company, everyone could see the treacle sandwich he was balancing palm upwards in his left hand.

The Army, over the years had devised a format for explaining a military situation to soldiers. But Major Griffin had not bothered to learn the sequence of delivering such information. The first point he should have covered was the ground. This must be explained in some detail bringing out its advantages and disadvantages.

'Knocker' modified this slightly by stating to his command, "Right lads, we're going up country to shoot some Gollies who are trying to stir it." Then licking a blob of treacle to stop it from running down his wrist, he reached backwards with his other arm towards the large map pinned behind him, and without looking, placed his hand in the middle of the Red Sea. "Just here," he confirmed.

With this brief statement he also covered the next two orders' headings:

Situation — with, 'who are stirring it up', and

Mission — with, 'to shoot some Gollies'.

After another few minutes of uninformable ramble, he suddenly paused, struck by a gem of an idea, turning to Captain Chuter standing by the door and now serving as the Company Second in Command, he requested, "Jack, I want the men to attach strips of

sacking to their equipment, to camouflage the damn stuff up."

"It's already done Sir," replied the tall man in a flat unenthusiastic tone.

"Oh good! Good! Bloody good!" beamed the OC punching his right fist into the palm of his left hand.

This was one of 'Knocker's' unconscious habits, doing it whenever he was pleased or emphasizing a point. However, as he stood with treacle splattered from knees to forehead, and the Company doubled over in laughter, he was all too aware of what a fool he had just made of himself. With cold dignity he peeled the gooey bread from his hand, then looking up ordered Corporal Whyte to open the window he was sitting beside.

Ken stepped back just in time, as a sticky missile sailed past him to land in the dirty Aden sand beyond.

The sweat that oozed from Dave Urwin was not solely confined to him, it was a general thing throughout the Company, caused by the warmth of the night and exertion as the men moved. 'C' Company were under orders from the Commanding Officer to march through the night to be in a position by dawn, where they could guard a flank of the rest of the battalion, as it crossed an exposed piece of ground to a high feature beyond.

Dave knew the order, and had been in the Army long enough to appreciate time and distance, which was causing him to wonder why they had not reached their objective — a ridge line. The route from the deserted village they had left the evening before was only four miles, even a Company moving in semi-open formation, across this broken ground should have travelled a mile an hour. But after nine hours and now with a thin pale streak showing in the eastern sky, there was still no indication that they were approaching their destination.

The reason for this although few in the Company knew it, was the OC had got the Company lost, and was only pointed in the right direction by Captain Chuter who then took over the responsibility of navigation. The result of this, that really annoyed Urwin was the added time meant he had to carry his machine gun those extra hours.

This however, was not his beloved Bren gun, what he now carried was the Army's recent replacement, the belt feed General Purpose Machine Gun, the GPMG or Gimpy as it had been nicknamed. It did have some added advantages, but at the moment the one big disadvantage he was concerned about most was that it weighed an

extra seven pounds.

Eight Platoon's position of order of march was as the rear platoon, following at a tactical bound, but within sight of the rest of the Company 150 metres forward of them. But to remain at this distance, staying in contact with the Company at night depended on the concentration and ability of the platoon's two forward scouts.

Eight Platoon's forward scouts on this occasion failed badly. As the light increased it became apparent that 'C' Company had lost 8 Platoon. Second Lieutenant Dryberg, the Platoon Commander, was furious, but could do nothing about it, as radio silence was imposed, his only hope was that the Company was somewhere ahead and could be overtaken. However, this was to be handicapped by his necessary re-deployment of the platoon.

During the night they had moved across the rocky desert in two close columns, but now because of the dawn light, the sections were shaking out, to form three arrowhead formations, advancing as a triangular defence with the Platoon HQ in the middle. Further ahead the rest of 'C' Company had also halted to shake out. Captain Chuter had recommended this, for the OC was too busy punching his left palm, demanding to know where 8 Platoon had got to.

Chuter checked his watch, the ridge was now in sight, and in under an hour the battalion would be moving.

"We must push on Sir, John will have to find his own way," he told Griffin waving his arm in a signal for the point platoon to start moving.

Their route cut through a wadi, flanked by rocky sides that sloped down to its loose stone and sand-covered surface, from those rocky slopes the local Radfan tribesmen began what they had been doing to unknown intruders for centuries — they began to kill them.

The first shot pierced Corporal Steve Sherran's upper right forearm. He immediately spun around rifle raised looking for the member of his section who had shot him. This was understandable for Sherran was always hard on his men, and had been expecting something like this ever since the Company had been issued live ammunition.

The first to die was 9 Platoon's signaller with a 30 calibre bullet through the head. The Paratroopers' first reaction was to take cover but this proved to be in short supply. There were no rocks suitably large enough, nor folds in the sand deep enough.

The fire coming down on 'C' Company was not heavy, neither was it being delivered by modern weapons. The rifles aimed at the men of

Charlie Company were, Mausers, Martini-Henrys, Lee-Enfields, Mannlichers and others, but they were being aimed accurately.

Fire was returned, but at a disadvantage, for their targets were above them and concealed behind pre-selected solid cover. If this enemy had positioned themselves on only one side of the wadi perhaps the Company's anti-ambush drills could have been put into effect. But due to the panic and general confusion of being fired at from two sides, which resulted in everyone scrambling and scratching, for any form of protection, while trying to aim at thin wisps of cartridge smoke, it didn't.

On hearing the first shots 8 Platoon as one halted, crouching into a fire position to await whatever the next order would be. The platoon was still in its section arrowhead formation, 3 section, the point section commanded by Ken Whyte, 2 section right flank under Sam Kyle, with 1 section on the left. All section commanders were looking towards Platoon HQ waiting for a signal of action. Lieutenant Dryberg on hearing the first shots closed on his Signaller expecting radio silence to have been broken, giving some indication of what was happening over the net. Running out of patience, he finally decided to make the first move.

"Get on to the company, Burrows. I've got to know what's happening."

Raising the handset to his mouth the Signaller began to speak, "Hello three, this is three-two, over."

This was repeated several times before Dryberg stood up deciding action was better than inaction. Pointing to a low ridge on the right flank, beyond which the firing was coming from he shouted so all could hear, "Eight Platoon we're changing direction to the right. Two section take up point, now everyone move! Move!"

Sam Kyle leapt to his feet repeating Dryberg's order to his section, leading them off at a stiff march. The first to the ridge were Urwin and Kennedy, the section gun group. The base being sheer for the first six or eight feet, they ran up and down until a footstep and hand hold was discovered. Urwin leaving his gun with Kennedy pulled himself to the top, then turned to catch it as Billy heaved the weapon upwards.

"Go on Davey," shouted Kyle as he approached the rock base. "Get to the top we'll catch you up."

Urwin didn't reply, instead he began to pick his way up the slope forcing his quickest pace. At the crest, he paused half-crouching, fighting for breath while trying to comprehend what he was seeing. Below him heavy firing could be heard, but this was coming from

dead ground he couldn't look into. However, 600 metres away across the wadi, he could see figures in coloured dress amongst the rocks, firing down. Just as eyes and brain deduced that these could only be enemy, Sam Kyle's voice barked from behind him in breathless rasps, "For Christ sake Dave open up, get fire onto those bastards over there."

Urwin resting the front legs of the gun on a low boulder quickly sat down behind it. Then pulling the butt into his shoulder, cocked the working parts and took aim all in one movement. Fixing the foresight on a smudge of blue amongst the rocks, he squeezed the trigger. Looking over the sights he tried to determine if his burst of shots were on target. Behind him he felt someone unclipping one of the belts of ammunition he wore angled across his chest.

"Where ya shooten Dave?" asked Billy Kennedy, kneeling beside the gun to clip the extra belt he had taken off Urwin onto the one already on the weapon.

"That fucker in the blue," replied Urwin.

"Have another go. I'll watch ya shots." As Urwin fired a second burst, Kennedy studied through sweat-blurred eyes the area of the target for the bullets strike.

"Go right," he hollered, "Go right."

Another burst.

"Go right again." Again the gun recoiled into Urwin's shoulder. "You're on," shouted Billy. "Now give it to him."

As the gun's fire began to land around the blue smudge, it slipped out of sight, below a boulder. In a flash Kennedy selected another target for his gunner.

"Right two o'clock Davey, there's two of them shootin' from the same rock."

Urwin shifted his point of aim, sending three rapid bursts of fire towards his new target.

While his gun team was engaging, Sam Kyle had been gathering his section's riflemen one by one as they arrived breathless, but eager. Glancing back hoping to see the Platoon Commander and not, he realized the fight he was now encroaching into would have to be fought initially by him and his seven men.

He knew it was pointless directing rifle fire across the wadi, for the distance cancelled out their accuracy. Instead he decided to lead them down the forward slope to attack from behind the enemy on their

side. Leaving Urwin to concentrate his gun fire across the wadi, he spread his other five men out in extended line, then set them off with a downward wave of his arm.

There were enemy somewhere among the rocks to his front, for when first cresting the ridge, he could hear the low velocity fire of their older rifles. However, since the section's machine gun began its work he was not aware of many recent shots.

Reg Berrill was the first to see one of the tribesmen, a hawked-nosed, black bearded man in a dirty grey turban, not aiming down at the trapped men of the Company, but looking up at him.

On hearing the firing from their rear, the natives had paused in their game, not too sure as to what was developing, but now with the arrival of 2 Section's riflemen they realised the fun was over and it was time to leave.

As the Arab bolted at a crouching run, Berrill snapped the butt of his rifle into his shoulder to fire two quick shots. Suddenly everyone had a target, for the Redfan tribesman had only two battle drills, 'A' shoot from ambush, or 'B' run. This fire fight then became a melee of shouts, shots and hot pursuit.

"Sam they're breaking left."

"Into them then, get stuck in." Kyle and his men chased the Arabs in short dashes from cover to cover, giving each other support as they moved, firing when targets appeared.

"Stan watch your right. I hit one of the bastards, but I'm not sure he's dead."

"Jonesy he's coming your way."

"There! There! Get the bastard."

Sam had to stop his men after a hundred metres, they were spreading out and he would have soon lost control. The firing, that had not stopped for the last twenty minutes, ever since the battle had begun, now ceased. The enemy disappearing into the bare rocky terrain as if it were the London Underground.

But not all, 2 Section had killed four and taken a wounded prisoner, whose left arm hung off at the elbow, a result of the 7.62 millimetre high velocity round. After a thorough search only one body was discovered on the far ridge, but several blood spoors were discovered leading out of the area.

Eight Platoon came out of the action as heroes with no casualties. But the rest of the Company suffered badly. Four dead and seven

wounded, besides 9 Platoon's Signaller, the other dead were 9 Platoon's Commander, Lieutenant Roberts, who died trying to drag his already dead Signaller to cover, and a gun team from 7 Platoon who unwisely stayed in the open to return the fire with their General Purpose Machine Gun.

The rest of the morning was spent clearing up the mess with the aid of the Battalion Medical Officer, sent to them by helicopter, who when he got around to it hacked off what was left of the prisoner's shattered left arm with a bayonet. The same helicopter took away 'C' Company's dead and wounded to a cemetery and hospital in Aden.

In the afternoon Major Griffin received the order to move his Company a mile on up the wadi, to occupy a village. This was done by 7 and 9 Platoons, first securing two nearby high features, once this was accomplished 8 Platoon entered the village, skirmishing through by sections to find it deserted. An hour later as 2 Section enjoyed a late afternoon brew, around a cluster of outbuildings, a lone bullet scattered them to cover.

Billy Kennedy and Reg Berrill dived through the doorway of one of the windowless huts, flinging themselves on the hard-packed stale earth floor. Scrambling to his feet Reg began to assemble his rifle, for when the shot struck he had been cleaning it.

"Bloody hell," he cursed realizing he had snatched up all his weapon parts except the breech block. Billy crouched by the door trying to spot the sniper, but also watching his mess tin ten metres away perched on a hexamine burner. As he stood up to see if the water inside was boiling, another bullet struck the door sill.

"Jesus," he exclaimed leaping back four paces.

"Watch it Billy, that bastard was aiming for you," warned Reg, standing in the centre of the hovel holding the parts of his useless rifle.

"Sodding bleeder! So he thinks he can see me off," retorted Kennedy angrily, stepping back into the doorway to stand there for three full seconds, before moving his body to one side, but still watching one-eyed around the door frame. The bullet, Billy had invited cut the air where he had been standing, to kick up a splat of soil a metre from Berrill's toes.

"What the hell you playing at?" he demanded of Kennedy.

"Trying to spot the bastard," was the reply as he again silhouetted himself in the doorway.

"You're a nutter Billy, get out of there," advised Reg. This Kennedy

did, but not because he was asked. Again a bullet struck the earth floor.

“Got him Reg, I see the bastard. He’s up in those rocks,” exclaimed a jubilant Kennedy.

Then taking his digging tool, a short handled pick from the yoke of his equipment he began to punch a hole through the side of the mud and stone wall. Shortly he had a six inch opening behind which he crouched to aim his rifle.

“Is he still there?” asked Berrill.

“Yah but he ain’t showing much of himself,” replied Billy adjusting his rear sight.

Holding a steady aim for another minute he finally lost patience.

“‘Ere Reg, go stand in the door for a second.”

“Get fucked!”

“Come on Reg,” pleaded Kennedy, “He’s about four hundred metres off, I need’a draw him out a bit, just show yourself a little.”

Berrill placing his dismantled rifle on the floor, begrudgingly took up a position beside the door. With lightening reflexes he leapt across the shaft of daylight.

“OK, how was that?” he asked in breathless pants.

“How’s what? I said show yourself, that bastard up there would’a had to be on radar to spot you,” complained Billy. “Now let him have something to look at.”

Berrill against his better judgement quickly stepped into the doorway, then just as quickly back again.

“Yeh that’s better I can just see him. Again Reg! Again!”

“Oh for fuck sake Billy,” begged Berrill.

“Go on! Go on!” exhorted Kennedy gripping his rifle in a tight aim.

Reg with a pounding heart, once more flitted into the wall of light. The crack of the SLR filled the building. To be followed by a triumphant shout from Kennedy, as he watched a Lee-Enfield rifle slide down the face of a boulder.

“Got him! We got him Reg! Reg — Reg what’s up with you?”

“What’s up with me! What’s up with me! What the fucking hell does it look like?” retorted Berrill angrily, now lying on his back several feet from the door, while trying to stop the flow of blood with

both hands, from the bullet wound in his left thigh.

Later that afternoon, as Corporal Whyte was touring his section location to check the men were staying alert, he found himself confronted by the OC walking alone through the village, his only protection a nine millimetre automatic pistol holstered on his belt.

“Ah Cor-por-al, ah...h,” began Griffin pretending the name was just on the tip of his tongue.

“Whyte Sir.”

“Whyte, yes of course,” confirmed the OC beating his right fist into left palm.

“Corporal Whyte I want you to do a little job for me.”

“Yes Sir,” replied Ken with a cautious tone, bracing himself for God knows what.

“I want you to take your section out there,” commanded the Major waving an arm at ten- thousand square miles of Southern Arabia, “and bring me back twenty Golly heads.”

Before Whyte could express his acceptance which he wasn’t intending to do, the OC quickly amended his orders.

“No! No! They would be too heavy. Make that forty Golly ears instead.”

Then with fist repeatedly punching palm, he walked off staring towards the horizon while muttering to himself, “Yes that will do, that will do nicely.”

Whyte made a bee-line for Company HQ and Captain Chuter.

The Captain listened to what Griffin had told the Corporal to do with a blank stare. But Company Sergeant Major Allander standing nearby snatched his beret off his head and slammed it into the ground, to stand with both fists clenched waist high while staring skywards, his face a mask of frustrated anger.

“Never mind what the OC told you Corporal Whyte, the situation has changed now. You and the rest of your platoon will be on another task tonight,” came Chuter’s reply, then added, “When you return to your platoon, tell Mr Dryberg to see me — now — for a briefing and also tell him to give the rest of you a warning order to stand-by for an ambush patrol tonight.”

It seems the battalion had been given information gained by the District’s British Political Officer, that a camel train carrying arms for

the local dissident tribesmen would be passing down a near-by track tonight.

An hour later, Lieutenant Dryberg gathered 8 Platoon around a hastily laid-out sand model with which to brief them for the night's operation. After giving a quick outline of what the task would be, and how it was to be carried out, he went on to explain in detail, step by step, how he wanted the ambush implemented. Having explained the ground with the aid of his sand model, he covered the situation regarding friendly and enemy forces and emphasised the mission they were expected to complete.

When Dryberg touched on the subject of the enemy he also commented that the guns for the tribesmen were being supplied from Egypt on Nasser's authority, who it was thought was now unstable mentally, having contracted a venereal disease. On hearing this Billy Kennedy whispered to Urwin, "He must have been knocking off the same bint as that Kassem bloke."

At the end of the briefing he took the platoon to a suitable piece of ground, where he rehearsed them in all stages of the intended operation. When the Lieutenant was satisfied they had got it right, he gave a thirty minute break in which to have a brew and something to eat. Their last chance until sometime the next day.

At dusk the platoon formed up in its order of march, stripped of all excess equipment, faces and hands blackened by camouflage cream. Prior to moving off Dryberg and his Platoon Sergeant, inspected every man one by one, concluding with each jumping up and down to ensure there was nothing loose, unmasked or not secured which would rattle or otherwise cause a sound, during the two mile journey to the ambush position.

The disposition of the platoon ambush was a simple linear one with every man positioned on the same side of the track, no more than ten metres from it. Mr Dryberg commanded the central killer group of fifteen, all armed with rifles or Stirling sub-machine guns. To his left and right one hundred metres on each flank were two cut off groups, whose task it was to warn of the enemies approach and to deal with anyone trying to escape out of the killing ground. The fourth party commanded by the Platoon Sergeant was sited on a small knoll seventy metres back down the shallow wadi the platoon had followed into the ambush area, and was there to cover the men's line of retreat.

Sam Kyle was in charge of the left hand cut off group, which consisted of himself, Dave Urwin with his Gimpy, Billy Kennedy his No. 2 and one other from the section. The ambush had been set since

8.30 pm. and although it was now almost midnight, the awareness and concentration of the four men had not laxed. For if this gun-toting camel caravan was to come, they would be the first to know, because the intelligence brief emphasised that it was travelling from the north, they were the northerly cut-off group.

Kennedy was the first to be alerted, by the faint sound of rhythmical plodding of animal foot falls, drifting to him through the night's still, warm air. Gently he tapped Kyle's hand, pointing first to his ear, then up the darkened track. Kyle listened for some seconds then tensed as he also heard the distinct steady motion.

Gripping the thin communication cord, which led to the killer group, he now concentrated his attentions on a bend of the track fifty metres away. With heart pounding he started as a figure carrying a rifle came into view walking down the centre of the pathway. Sam jerked the cord three times. The soldier on the left flank of the killer group, who had the cord tied to his wrist, responded by jerking back, then tapping the man beside him. Without a word this tap travelled the length of the lying men, informing them that enemy were approaching.

Kyle's cut-off group watched as, from behind the first man, another appeared, this time leading a pack camel, then another man also leading a camel. Sam counted seven men and five animals as they passed his position, on their way into the platoon's killing ground. Shortly after the last man passed him he suddenly realized others were coming around the turn of the track, but these men seemed to be different. In the dimness of the moonlight, he could see they led no camels and appeared to be wearing some form of uniform.

Lieutenant Dryberg let the first two camels pass beyond him, so as to have the whole party full in the centre of the ambush, then he dropped his hovered hand onto Corporal Whyte's thigh. This was the ambush being sprung. Ken squeezed the trigger of his SMG to send a burst of fire towards a man leading a camel with one hand, while balancing a rifle across his shoulder by its barrel with the other. The night erupted with the noise of gunfire, shouting and screams as men and animals either died or ran in confusion.

Within seconds the action was over, three camels and four Arabs lay dead or dying on the track. Mr Dryberg began to shout, "Stop! Stop!" With the rest of the killer group picking it up, ceasing fire themselves, but also shouting, "Stop!"

The Lieutenant not understanding why someone was still shooting, angrily rose to his knees trying to identify the offenders.

The offenders were Kyle and his party, who were at that moment in the middle of a fire fight. When Dryberg sprung the ambush, the left hand cut-off group also opened up, but they were shooting for their lives. At that instant, Kyle estimated fifty to seventy armed men were spread between him and the bend of the track and still coming.

Immediately he heard the first shot, Dave Urwin began to spray the length of the column with long bursts of fire. It was a gunner's dream, he couldn't have missed with his eyes closed. But their advantage of shock and surprise lasted only a short period. As the track cleared of the living, roles were quickly reversed. Now fire from many different points began to be returned, especially from the bend of the track.

"Dave keep your fire going down on the turning in the track, don't give them the chance to come at us," shouted Kyle.

Then pulling at the fourth member of his group, a tall lanky blond youth to stop him from firing, and attract his attention, he began to shout in the lad's ear, "Jonesy! Jonesy go back to the boss, tell him what's happening. Tell him I'm counting to two hundred and then coming back. Have you got that?"

The young soldier replied by nervously nodding his head, then rising to his feet turned at the run.

"Shout as you go in Jonesy, they might shoot you," warned Kyle, as Kennedy clipped another belt of ammunition to the one already disappearing into Urwin's gun. "One, two, three," he began.

Kyle never got to two hundred. At one hundred and forty shooting began to spread around their left, warning him that shortly they would be in danger of being cut off. At one hundred and eighty he slapped Urwin's shoulder, ordering him to pick his machine gun up and rejoin the platoon. As he and Kennedy made their dash, Sam emptied his sub-machine gun in quick short bursts at half a dozen different gun flashes, then in a crouching run doubled after his gun team.

Dryberg now aware, thanks to the amount of fire coming from his left flank and Private Jones' breathless, disjointed report, that his platoon might be taking on a little more than it was equipped to handle, began making plans to withdraw.

Knowing it would be folly to engage in a pitch battle in the dark, he gave orders for everyone to prepare to move back through the platoon's rear protection party, then kneeling on the left flank of his killer group he strained his eves into the dark willing Kyle's party to appear. The GPMG had not fired for some time which indicated to the Lieutenant his men were either moving back or dead.

“Halt, hands up,” barked the soldier beside him as a figure emerged out of the shadows of the stony landscape.

“It’s me Billy,” came a reply from the gloom as the figure stopped.

“Rabbit,” barked back the soldier, raising his rifle to the aim.

“Pie! Pie! For fuck sake. We’re coming in,” rasped Kennedy drily, lowering his arms.

Before he could reach them a burst of shots from within the ambush position had everyone hugging the ground. As fingers tightened around triggers, Ken Whyte began to shout, “Boss! Boss!”

In response to his cry the Lieutenant found Whyte bent over one of the Platoon Sergeant’s rear party, trying to bandage a groin wound that pumped blood over bandages and hands.

“What the hell happened?” he demanded.

“We were being surrounded,” explained Bruley the Platoon Sergeant.

“I had to move.”

“They just ran right at us Sir, so we let fly,” broke in Whyte, pushing hard on the wound to stop the oozing blood.

With his pre-selected escape route now denied to him, Dryberg quickly altered his withdrawal plan.

“We’ll have to use the track. Sergeant Bruley have this man carried, then take the platoon two hundred metres south and wait for me to join you. I, with Corporal Kyle’s gun group will be covering you out.”

The Sergeant in a highly agitated state of fear and flap, began to do as he was told, but in a less than efficient manner. Dryberg was too busy to notice this for once; he had sent a runner off to warn Kyle’s party to sit tight.

He reached out towards his Signaller, who hadn’t left his side, with the command, “Burrows handset.”

Burrows passed him the radio’s dual send and receive handpiece, pressing its communication switch he then called into the mouthpiece for assistance.

“Hello five-four Charlie, this is three-two. X-ray one-five on my command, over.”

Without pause a voice came back. “Five-four Charlie X-ray one-five wait, out.”

Dryberg startled by the speed of reply to his request for mortar fire stared for a second at the handset, then tossing it the length of its short cable back to Burrows, dashed off in the direction of Kyle's covering party.

The voice at the other end of that brief but business-like conversation was one taking a keen interest in 8 Platoon's task, Lance Corporal Andy Dawson, late of 9 Platoon and now attached to 'C' Company as an MFC (Mortar Fire Controller), with his 81 millimetre mortar section.

Dawson, switching on his shielded torch, reading the pre-recorded elevation and bearing figures that he and Lieutenant Dryberg had agreed on that afternoon, he began to shout them to his two mortar teams who were hunched around their weapons waiting.

"Sir! Sir!" whispered Burrows to his Platoon Commander, "From five-four Charlie, they're ready to fire."

Dryberg raised his hand in confirmation, then reached forward to pull at Sam Kyle's leg.

"Corporal Kyle we're moving, follow me." This he spoke in a whisper for the enemy's early fusillade of returned fire had now slackened to the odd jittery single shot or sudden burst.

With Kyle's initial withdrawal from his first position, this set the enemy the problem of either groping around in the dark to locate them and continue the battle, or disengage completely to lick some very bloody wounds. It seemed to Dryberg they were doing the latter for no approaching movement could be detected, but he was still taking no chances.

Stopping to wave Kyle's party past him he reached towards Burrows fumbling around the radio he carried on his back until he found the lead to the handset. "Hello five-four Charlie reference X-ray one-five, fire now, over."

At the other end of the radio call Andy Dawson acknowledged, then lowering his mouthpiece shouted to the number ones of his mortars, "Fire!"

As the mortar bombs slipped down their tubes to be fired by the striker at the bottom, Dryberg followed his platoon's rear covering party out of their ambush area.

In the hot blinding flashes and confusion of a night fire fight it was extremely difficult to make the right decision every time. But up to this point John Dryberg had remained cool and correct. Now he was about to pay for his only mistake.

The mortar bombs at that moment in the air were shortly to land on 8 Platoon's ambush position, in order to discourage any of the enemy from taking up pursuit. Dryberg judged the time of flight of the bombs to be forty seconds, ample for him and his men to safely rejoin the rest of the platoon further down the track. What he didn't reckon on was the slowness of Burrows, his radio operator who through the weight of his load and the unpredictable footing of the stony ground was forced to fall behind.

A hundred metres from their killing ground as Mr Dryberg stopped to reach back in assisting his Signaller, the first silent approaching mortar bomb arrived. The 81 millimetre mortar bomb had been perfected to incorporate a maximum killing area from its point of impact, this was ensured by an explosive content that threw its shrapnel far, fast and low, intended to inflict casualties at a normally unprecedented range.

Unfortunately the only casualty Andy Dawson's fire claimed was Dryberg himself. As the first bomb exploded, the rear cover party flattened themselves on the ground, Dryberg feeling a stab of pain in his ankle ignored it as he counted the explosions of the ten bombs he had called for, however, on rising he found it was impossible to retain his balance. Reaching up with one arm he asked his Signaller for assistance, "Burrows give me a hand I think I twisted my ankle."

This lasted only a few steps before he again collapsed this time with a painful moan.

"Sam! Sam!" cried Burrows up the track, "Give us a hand the Boss is hurt."

Five minutes later 8 Platoon's Commander was being half-carried in to rejoin the rest of his men, hopping on one leg while supported between Kyle and Billy Kennedy. On examination they found he had a wound caused by a splinter of metal, which cut through his puttee and boot top, severing the achilles tendon behind the left ankle.

Daylight found the ambush party in single file approaching 'C' Company's defending perimeter. There to greet them Captain Chuter, showing admiration and concern for their night's work.

At the rear Jim Sinclair and six others of Ken Whyte's section were struggling with the body of the man who had been accidentally shot in the groin, and then died through loss of blood during the march back. Without Dryberg's knowledge Sergeant Bruley had told the carrying party to dump the body, assuring them it would be collected in the morning.

At that point Jim Sinclair angrily faced up to the Sergeant telling

him the body would not be left, and if need be he would carry it the rest of the distance back to the Company position. Sinclair had had enough of Bruley, all through the wait in the ambush he had been a constant source of false alarms, forever twisting and squirming, setting off little squeals of noise from the gravel he lay in and asking did you hear this, can you hear that.

The fire from the ambush only heightened his imagination, culminating in the unwarranted rush which resulted in the death of one of his men. Sinclair knew they were breaking the golden rule of ambushes by moving without warning, but there was little he could have done about it. When Bruley stood up, ordering everyone to run towards the track, there was no option but to follow.

The inadequacies of 8 Platoon's senior non-commissioned officer were many, except for his lack of guts these could not be wholly attributed to him alone. Bruley who had spent ten years as a Company clerk, filing paper and sharpening pencils, could justifiably fall back on the excuse that he never asked to be promoted into a rifle platoon, he would have quite happily transferred to the cushy comfort of the Battalion Orderly Room. However, now lumbered with a teeth appointment at the sharp end, he was finding out what real soldiering called for, and not liking it. Besides with a wife, three children, and a mortgage to pay for on a house out at Fleet, he didn't see any reason to risk his neck for a burnt out piece of wog desert.

As the sun rose a Scout helicopter was dispatched by Battalion HQ to assess the damage the platoon had caused during their ambush. The Intelligence Officer who flew in the helicopter, without dropping below five hundred feet, but with powerful binoculars, found nothing to report except blood patches. This absence of evidence caused few doubts amongst 8 Platoon, for they knew what had been done. Burrows the signaller personally tripped over one body on the track when leaving the ambush, and Sam Kyle counted over a dozen felled by Urwin's Gimpy.

Triumphant as they felt, this night's action would willingly have been forfeited if only Lieutenant Dryberg had not suffered his wound. For that morning he was 'casivacted' back to Aden, where he was repaired but doomed to become a semi-invalid, having to leave the Army to take up a secondary career in accountancy with a firm in Leicester.

They had called him the Boss, what he said went, not through any personal toughness on his part, but because over the fourteen months he had commanded them he had proved to be a competent leader. Fair. but quick to discipline if need be, always seeing their individual

or collective problems were dealt with by the people responsible for doing so, and never once asking his men to accomplish anything he could not achieve himself.

Now this knight, this Airborne Galahad whose first concern was always for his men, was to be replaced by Bruley, a modern day Uriah Heep.

CHAPTER 13

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,

An' the women come out to cut up what remains,

Jest roll to your rifle an' blow out your brains

An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

Rudyard Kipling

Although at first unbelieved by senior Intelligence down in Aden, that Kyle's party did engage uniformed troops, this was soon confirmed by the District Political Officer. Reports coming in from his local sources, verified that troops from across the Yemen border, were operating around the battalion area.

This caused higher Command to reinforce 5 Para's operation, with three more Infantry battalions and an Artillery regiment. For they now suspected that perhaps the Paratroopers were about to come up against something more than a local tribal rebellion. Until this support could arrive the battalion was ordered to take up a defensive position to await these reinforcements.

This was done under the Commanding Officer's direction, by establishing a defended ring around a battalion base area, through the occupation of three high features on the fringe of the area. Each feature being allocated to a rifle Company, and was in itself a sub-defensive position.

'C' Company's temporary home was a small triangular hill, blocking two track junctions, leading out of twin high-ridged wadis. Between their hill, and the wadis, the ground bare and rocky was lined in ripply waves by a dozen shallow gullies. The only vegetation of any size to be seen, was thorn bushes, scattered singularly or in small clumps, throughout the mile or so, stretching from the Company's hill to the wadi entrances.

The forward perimeter overlooking this junction, had been allotted to 3 Section with Jim Sinclair and his machine gun, sub-letting a stone sangar, which gave him clear fields of fire to north and west. Normally when in defence the men would dig down, but in the Radfan the hard stone surface made this impossible. Instead little rock walled shelters were built, which protected men from rifle fire but not much else.

Sinclair, sitting on a slab of rock, hunched behind his GPMG was watching possibly the only thing of beauty the country had to offer — this was the brief explosion of reds and golds as the sun set almost directly to his front. As the crimson globe settled beyond the far ridge, he became aware of a figure approaching from his rear.

Peering over the low battlement of stones he greeted this normally cheerful individual with a smile.

“What’s up Eric, you so bored you’ve come out looking for work?”

Eric Perry, the Company Medic was on attachment from 23 Parachute Field Ambulance, and had been with the Company since they arrived in Bahrain. Most of the time, here in the Radfan he remained with the HQ element, but as often as he could he would get out and about visiting the platoons to check on cuts, blisters and their general state of health.

“I gott’a go for a walk Jock,” replied the tall Medic, stopping to remove his beret, running a hand through loose black hair.

“You’re a bit late the last patrol came back an hour ago, and it’s getting too dark for walkies now,” came back Sinclair not recognizing the seriousness in Perry’s voice.

“I got to get across to ‘B’ Company. They got a casualty and can’t move him.” Jim now in the picture began to eliminate all other possibilities.

“Well where’s their Medic?”

“They haven’t got one.”

“Can’t they lift him out by chopper?”

“One’s away and the other’s u/s.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Sinclair finally.

“Been listening in on the battalion net at Company HQ. Now which way is Bravo?”

“Over there on that ridge, but it’s more than a mile off,” answered Sinclair reluctantly, then continued, “besides what’s battalion doing about it?”

“Not much, the MO is hoping to get up there at first light,” said the Medic, hitching his medical pack higher up his back, as he turned in the direction the gunner had pointed.

“Well who the fuck told you to go?” asked Sinclair now becoming annoyed at the reality of the situation.

“No one,” replied Perry, setting off downhill.

“You bugger,” cursed the Scot after him, “You’ll get yourself killed.” Then standing to watch him go called a warning, “Dinna go through that village on the far side Eric.”

The Medic acknowledged without turning, by raising one arm, waving back over his shoulder. “Cheers Jock.”

The next morning a clearance patrol from ‘B’ Company found him at the base of their ridge, three hundred metres from the village Sinclair warned him of. The sight sickened the patrol causing some to vomit. His death had been slow, inflicted by knives handled with obvious skill.

Besides the hundred or so cuts to his naked body, his eyes had been gouged out and his tongue cut from his mouth, then replaced by his testicles. Finally, still alive, they had cut the young Medic’s abdomen open to scatter his intestines about the ground.

As word of this spread, every member of the battalion would gladly have levelled the village and butchered everyone in it, but being British, the incident had to be handled in a more judicial manner.

The Political Officer advised against any form of reprisal, as this would possibly jeopardize future Intelligence information. The Commanding Officer listened to his experienced consul, gained through years of dealing with the local natives, then sent his Second in Command by helicopter to arrest the village head man.

Hovering at a thousand feet, the Second in Command questioned the wrinkled faced, grey bearded, skin and sinewed Arab, about the murder of the Medic. But according to him and the Provost Sergeant, who was acting as escort, he refused to talk, choosing instead to step outside for a breath of fresh air, landing, funnily enough, in the centre of his village. Contrary to the Political Officer’s warning his informants’ Intelligence did not dry up, in fact it now trebled.

Due to the battalion being temporarily confined to a static location, this drew the inevitable pot shooting by those brave enough, or foolish enough to try. The odd bullet pinging around the positions was relatively acceptable, until one evening a mortar was used, inflicting confusion and fear, one casualty with a bad stomach wound.

The enemy mortar although fired from somewhere around the entrance of one of the twin wadis, was undetectable which gave it a licence to scatter bombs in and around ‘C’ Company’s position for most of the night. Without a Company Medic, the care of the injured now fell to Company Sergeant Major Allander, who knelt beside the

stomach wound victim monitoring his condition. Captain Chuter also periodically came to stand over the ashen-faced soldier, who lay on a canvas stretcher moaning with pain between fits of unconsciousness.

Finally out of ear-shot the two men agreed that unless given hospital attention shortly he would die. Chuter first contacted Battalion HQ by radio, requesting one of the Army Air Corps Scout helicopters. But was told one was not available. However, battalion relayed the plea on to the RAF, a hundred miles away in Aden. This message was considered by senior officers who judged it was far too dangerous to risk a helicopter and its crew, night flying through country that was notoriously hazardous.

This was understandable, for the navigational aids of a Wessex helicopter were not sophisticated enough to allow it to swan about at night in the wadis of the Radfan, whose sides in places rose to five thousand feet. The Commanding Officer refusing to take no for an answer repeatedly radioed Aden, at one stage screaming over the net that he had a dying man, and that at least an effort should be made. Despite the Colonel's personal plea the RAF powers that be, still gave the mission the thumbs down.

An hour later with mortar bombs continually trickling down at irregular intervals on 'C' Company, a voice suddenly came up on the battalion radio net, asking for the location of the wounded soldier. The voice was that of a Naval helicopter pilot, flying from an aircraft carrier cruising just off shore in the Red Sea. It seems they had been listening in on the conversation, between 5 Para and the RAF command at Khormaksar Airfield.

When the Air Force eventually convinced the Army that they were not prepared to risk a chopper, the Captain of the aircraft carrier dispatched one of his with a volunteer crew.

Once identification had been confirmed, Battalion HQ handed radio control of the helicopter over to 'C' Company, to talk it down. Captain Chuter listened for some seconds to locate the helicopter, then standing with radio headphones pressed over his ears, he began the task of threading a needle in the dark.

"Hello November four-five, this is Whisky Delta 3, over."

"Four-five, over," came the calm Naval acknowledgement.

"Whisky Delta 3, you are south west of us. About four or five miles. Remain on your present course, I will try to direct you onto my location, over."

Once Chuter had the aircraft turning in a wide circle around the

Company's hill top, he then attempted to pinpoint for the pilot the area within the blanket of blackness, where he would have to land.

"Hello November four-five, if you look below you, you will see the odd flash. We are in that area, over," was the Captain's Kindergarten message of direction.

"Four-five, I can see little flashes and big flashes which are you, over?" came back the Sailor.

"Whisky Delta three, we're in amongst the big ones, over," answered Chuter drily, establishing that the rescue operation would have to be done under the, fire of exploding mortar bombs.

At first this appeared a dicey prospect, but as the helicopter made its approach run, the mortar fire became more erratic landing on the lower slopes of the hill. Company Sergeant Major Allander guided it in with two shielded torches, held to his left and right, in outstretched hands.

Just as the Wessex skimmed in, to hover a metre off the rocky surface, an underslung load was cut loose to thud heavily onto the stones. Dust, grit and sand now whirlwinded around the helicopter stinging the flesh of the four men who struggled forward against the powerful downward wash of the rotor blades, to lift their injured companion through the chopper's awkward door frame. As soon as the stretcher was safely on, the Wessex, with an increased surge of noise and sand, lifted up into the starry night, and away to the British Military Hospital in Aden.

When silence again returned to the hill-top, Captain Chuter became aware of Major Griffin beside him, punching right fist into left hand.

"Fucking good show those Navy bods," he commented nodding his head from side to side.

For once the whole Company had to agree with their OC, more so when they discovered the underslung load they had dropped contained two hundred cans of beer.

In fairness to the RAF, 5 Para were soon to learn that both Airforce and Naval pilots were equally as brave. The difference was the RAF operated shackled to a set of Bible-thick rule books, dictating their every move; whereas the Navy had yet to get around to writing a rule book for its fliers.

The next evening mortar bombs again began to drop out of the night sky, onto 'C' Company's hill-top. This was to begin a game of 'catch me if you can', between the men of the Company and those firing the mortar, which went on for a week.

The Arabs cheekily set up their firing point in the same spot each time, and although the Paras laid cunning traps and ambushes they could not neutralize this troublesome weapon. Twice they attempted to out-mortar them, each time the rebels just picked theirs up and ran for the cover of the wadis.

On three evenings a party was sent to lay ambushes. But these must have been spotted each time, for the men merely lost a tense night's sleep.

Working on the principle that it takes a thief to catch a thief, Andy Dawson asked to accompany a patrol out to the enemies' unchanged base-plate position, in the hope of finding a solution to these attacks.

Sam Kyle placed the men of his section at a tactical distance around the shallow gully, where the enemy mortar was always fired from. Then watched as Dawson studied the area for some minutes. Following the foot prints of the mortar crew, he paced out the distance to the near-by wadi's entrance. For another ten minutes he consulted his map, took compass bearings, then timed himself to the second as he ran back to the mortar position.

"What the fuck was that all about Andy?" asked Kyle.

"I think I got these bastards snuffed," pondered Dawson, fixing the wadi with a serious stare, "But we'll find out tomorrow, if they show tonight."

Back on the hill-top, the mortar detachment Commander swotted over his map with the aid of a compass, protractor and plotter, computing ranges, grid references, charges, times of flight, bearings and deflections, planning the night's aerial snare.

Sundown found him sitting just behind his section's two mortars, impatiently awaiting the flash and dull thump of the enemies phantom mortar. He had positioned himself for simplicity of command, for when orders were to be given, he would shout them directly at the mortar teams. Shortly after dusk with the suddenness of a ghostly apparition, the flash of a mortar being fired, lit for a split second the darkness of the wadi's entrance.

Raising a compass to his eye, Dawson quickly confirmed with a rough bearing, that the mortar hadn't changed its position. Then wasting no time he ordered his number ones to fire one bomb each, set with a charge five. These first two mortar bombs would drop short, but were intended to, with the hope of starting the enemy crew running for the protective cover of the high-walled wadi.

With the aid of a torch, Dawson fixed his eyes to the second hand

of his watch, then without looking up, commanded his section to fire five more rounds each, this time with a charge seven, thirty seconds later he ordered another ten bombs fired. The patrol sent to investigate the results of Andy's counter-attack was beefed up, by including Dawson, two of his mortar men, Captain Chuter and two curious Sergeants.

As expected, no bodies were to be found, but the large stains of blood, the bits of bone and flesh and the darkly reddened, fly accompanied spoor trails, leading into the depths of the wadi were enough proof. That night Charlie Company had their first undisturbed sleep for a week.

While the Company had been absorbed in its nightly duel, behind them a steady build-up had been taking place. As well as the added Infantry and Artillery, supporting units were also involved: Engineers improving the road and water supply, signals to take charge of the extra communication links, and Ordnance to sort out the weight of stores now piling up at dumps and depots.

The RAF had also moved up in force, providing much needed helicopter support with their Wessex and Belvederes, relieving the pressure of the Army's overworked and under-maintained Scouts.

At command level attack plans were made, and dates set, but for 'Charlie' sweltering unprotected under a burning sun it was becoming a bore. Each day was a routine of stand-tos, fatigues, details and round the clock guards. These men had tasted blood, now all they wanted was to get on and finish the job. Besides, those black bastards had killed their mates and they were going to pay for that.

The Company's final patrol was a platoon affair carried out by Sergeant Bruley's new command. Their task was to sweep in force through the gullies, across the mouth of both wadis, to ensure there would be nothing unpleasant waiting for them, when the main attack commenced the next morning. At last light, Bruley re-entered the Company position to report that nothing eventful had been discovered or happened during his patrol.

However, it was another two hours before Sam Kyle and his section passed through the sentries. When the platoon swung back towards 'C' Company's hill-top, his section had come under sniper fire from one of the wadi entrances. As they were at that time caught in the open, Kyle doubled his men back to a gully to wait for support from the rest of the platoon. Because of its wide tactical march formation few in the platoon realised that 2 Section had been cut-off.

One of those who saw what did happen was Sergeant Bruley, but

he preferred to ignore it, hurrying the rest of the platoon away, hoping Kyle would rejoin him later. Although frightened of putting himself in physical danger, the real reason he left the scene so quickly was the knowledge that he was incapable of deploying his men, in the simple drills of providing supporting fire while 2 Section extracted themselves.

Ken Whyte and Jim Sinclair who had not known about the separation until well after the event were waiting as Kyle came into the platoon area.

“Where’s Bruley?” he asked, controlling his anger, but not disguising his hard expression or the tone of his voice.

“Over in Platoon HQ,” replied Sinclair.

Without a word the Corporal turned in that direction, disregarding Whyte’s suggestion that followed him through the dark.

“Leave off Sam, we’ll go see Chuter in the morning, he’ll put this right.”

“Where is the bastard?” he asked of the Platoon Signaller, as he arrived in the shallow depression of ground 8 Platoon was using as its headquarters.

Without interrupting his eating from a tin of ration pack compo-corned beef, Burrows jerked his head back over his shoulder at someone lying under a lightweight blanket. Placing his rifle down, Sam threw back the blanket to drag the Sergeant to his feet, knocking him back to the ground with a punch in the face.

“If you ever leave me or my lads like that again I’ll fucking swing for you,” warned Sam with cold fury, one finger jabbing at Bruley, before turning to pick up his rifle and fade into the night.

Bruley holding his face pulled the blanket over himself once more to remain under it for the remainder of the darkened hours.

The next morning’s offensive turned out to be a sledge hammer cracking a nut. Before first light Company groups were picking their way through the boulders and gullies prior to an all-out jump forward to seize vital ground. As the sun climbed above the eastern horizon, helicopters leap-frogged troops from hill-top, to hill-top, securing vantage points which dominated routes below them. Along these routes marched columns of soldiers, also leap-frogging each other, from objective to objective.

This lasted for two weeks while the troops advanced to, then finally along, the border area itself. Each afternoon the push would be halted,

to resume again shortly after midnight, always catching the tribesmen on the hop, for they were warriors of the day, believing that night was for sleeping. These tactics were not new, they had been learned by the British Army the hard way, years before on the north west frontier of India.

Resistance proved to be nothing more than token, for faced by the might of a modern Army with Artillery and RAF Hunter fighter support on call, the cunning Radfan tribesman took the discreet way out, hiding his firearms and slinking back to his village.

This was not the act of a coward, merely common sense. The Egyptian backed Yemen troops had fast retreated across their own border, leaving them with nothing but empty promises and a bloody future, filled with the traditional reprisals which were standard practice for an Arabian rebellion.

'C' Company's last action, like the first was an ambush, and like the first, was brought about by 'Knocker' again getting them lost on a night advance. The morning's light found the Company marching up a wadi with sloping thorn bush and boulder covered ridges either side. The entire Company was strung out in file formation, stretching back a quarter of a mile.

This would normally have been a safe way to move, because the high ground should have had pickets on it, allowing Charlie Company a safe passage. The OC realized he had fucked it up yet again, when he found himself once more, being fired at from both sides of the wadi. But 'Knocker' had learned something from that last ambush — once bitten, twice shy.

Turning back to face down the column, he bellowed so loud it deterred most from taking cover.

"Charge! Charge!" He continued to shout this one word, while first pointing to one ridge then the other.

This was an anti-ambush drill not to be found in any Military Training Pamphlet, but it worked. With bare chested abandon, he led half the Company in a charge up one ridge, while Captain Chuter rushed the other. Faced with a situation completely alien to anything ever done in hill fighting in the past, the natives packed up and cleared off, leaving 'C' Company on top of both ridges collapsed in breathless exhaustion and laughter.

'Knocker' although still weak on tactics was at least beginning to command, which now allowed his men to hold their heads up, and look other members of the battalion in the eyes, whenever his name was mentioned.

The soldiers resting in little packets one side of the helicopter pad, looked the way they felt — dirty, tired and relieved. All day 5 Para had been in the process of withdrawing, first by foot to this helipad, then out by chopper to the newly-built road head, and finally by lorries down to Aden.

The afternoon sun found 'C' Company the last to go, patiently waiting in their chalk order, for the queue of men to be whisked away group by group. Dave Urwin sat on a small rock, amongst the second to last stick of men cleaning his GPMG. Like the rest he was also weary, not from battle, for the last two weeks had been an anti-climax.

No, his weariness had been brought on through general wear and tear, caused by climate and operational duty, that had sucked at his body and mind, leaving him fit, but underweight and slightly punch drunk. A fortnight earlier everyone had been keyed up and gasping to get at these murdering savages, but they had not played the game. Instead of fighting to the last man against the invading infidels, they preferred to run away and hide.

As frustrating as that may be, Urwin knew he had no real cause to be disappointed, for he and his 'widow maker' as his machine gun had been christened by the Company, were credited with more kills than any other man in the battalion. This however, was not due to any homicidal aggression of his, but solely that of being in the wrong place at the right time.

During the first enemy ambush with four years' service behind him, he had been frightened and unsure. Even now suffering twinges of doubt as to whether he would have done the right thing, if Sam Kyle had not been there to give him orders, and Billy Kennedy who by his presence and cool assistance in supplying ammunition to the gun, and directing his fire, did wonders for his confidence and aim.

The platoon night ambush was the real test, greener soldiers might have panicked like Bruley, and come unstuck, but the main body didn't. This, due to the leadership of the Platoon's Commander, and his corporals who remained calm, while holding to drills and procedures that everyone understood and had practised in training.

Urwin looked up from the piston group he was scraping a hard black layer of carbon off, to watch Sam Kyle five metres away, also sitting, scratching sand from his scalp with the aid of dirty, broken finger nails. Looking to the others of the platoon around him, with their sweat-stained and torn clothes, Urwin felt a twinge of pride.

These sun-baked men in worn boots and dusty berets, had been

asked to produce and most had given. Urwin's silent affinity towards the men around him was not a new one, although he, like the rest, had taken the Queen's shilling, and his loyalty was to Her and his country, in battle he responded in much the same way as the British squaddie had done for centuries. Fighting not for God, Queen or country, but for his regiment and his mates.

A warning from Sam Kyle had everyone preparing to move, as their helicopter had just landed.

Dave, reassembling his Gimpy, checked the belt of fifty rounds he had concealed in his ammunition pouch. All ammunition had been withdrawn from the platoon when they first arrived at the pad, under the assumption that they no longer needed it. Like Urwin, most of the Company had buckshee cartridges hidden on them, intending that should the chopper be forced to land they were not going to end up like Eric Perry.

Before emplaning the men had to wait and watch as from the helicopters, seed grain, farming tools, and ploughs for pulling by animals were unloaded. This was the beginning of an official policy, towards re-habilitating the local tribesmen of their murderous ways.

The Sheikhs whose states had been affected by the recent uprising, demanded to sever heads and hands in the customary manner. But regional Political Officers, and those who dictate policies from air-conditioned rooms further south, deemed that a more humane line of winning hearts and minds be taken. This may have worked with a society that is responsive to compassion, and prepared to reject their code of blood feuds, but not these Arabian tribesmen. To them the olive branch was a sign of weakness, implanting the thought that if, in killing only a handful of British, they were given in turn seed for their fields and ploughs to turn the soil, what might they be given if they killed hundreds?

As the Paratroopers began their return to Bahrain, they were not to know that the 5th Battalion was far from finished with this smouldering powder keg. They had begun this play as star performers in the first act, and were to find themselves taking a final bow as the curtain dropped on the last.

Having just fought a war, there wasn't much that could be laid on training wise, to stimulate the battalion. Realizing this the Commanding Officer didn't even attempt to, instead a programme of sports, recreation, organized fun trips, and leave was implemented throughout the Companies, and so after the initial gripping of the men regarding dress, haircuts and general appearance, everyone either

slotted into a sports' team or sloped off on a trip, or to the White Sands leave camp on Mombasa beach, where they all got fornicated silly by the black Kenya bar girls.

Of course, camp life could not be neglected with fatigues and duties constantly being detailed, to provide the work force that kept the battalion group ticking over.

As easy going as camp life became, the one function that was not allowed to lower its standard was the guard mounting, this was the battalion's show piece of the day. The men involved each evening, would have spent the afternoon cleaning, polishing and pressing until they stood sparkling and neat in their best boots, and starched khaki dress. The inspection of the guard by the Duty Officer was meticulous, rewarding dusty boots or an unbrushed beret with OC's orders, where a stiff fine would be imposed. To minimize the chances of sand on the boots, or the cracking of the highly-bulled polish, or sweat breaking up starched creases, each member of the guard would be carried in a fireman's lift by two of his mates, from the billet to the square, where hopefully he could place his feet down in one spot, not to move again until the mounting began.

One morning it was found the NAAFI shop had been broken into and robbed of selected items. Although the SIB (Military Special Investigation Branch) was called in to carry out an investigation no villain was apprehended nor the goods recovered. However, for the next month or so, if those in the know caught Paddy Kieran or Scouse Holgarth at the right time of the week, a 'Seiko' watch or a 'Nikon' camera could be bartered for, for under a fiver.

Shortly after their return, Sam Kyle received promotion to full Corporal. Some joked that this was because he had volunteered to play for 'Knocker' Griffin's battalion rugby team, but everyone accepted it was well earned through merit, not crawling.

One Sunday morning, Kyle with the aid of his second stripe, found himself the camp guard Commander, standing under the guard room awning, watching a visitor arrive. The man who had just climbed down from an oil company lorry outside the gate, and was now walking towards the camp entrance, was a native. With black shoulder-length hair, and a scruffy untrimmed beard, which half-hid the mahogany brown skin of his face and neck, Sam twigged him right away as one of the camp labourers from the ragged khaki dress uniforms, and broken down issue sandals which he must have fished out of an Army dustbin and now wore.

"Over here John," hailed Kyle, as the Arab forgetfully walked past

the guard room without collecting his worker's pass.

The figure in the road halted, then in what seemed to Sam a contemptuous manner, half-turned, shading his eyes with one hand to fix him in a set stare, before stunning the Corporal with his reply.

"Congratulations, Sam, it's about time they made you a full screw."

Kyle recognizing the voice, but not the stocky underweight man, stepped off the veranda asking in a bewildered tone, "Fuck me Bobby is that you?"

"Yeh," replied Bob MacIntyre, "They let me off the island a day early."

Then looking through the guard room door beyond Sam, he asked, "Have you got a cup of chai in there? I got a mouth like a camel's ass."

The last armed working task for 8 Platoon, before moving along with the rest of 5 Para back to Aldershot was an escort duty. While stationed in Bahrain one of the battalion's commitments was to supply officers and senior non-commissioned officers as instructors or advisers, seconded to the local Military Forces of the friendly Sheikhdom states. Lieutenant Roe, now a Captain, made such a pain of himself in the Officers' Mess, that of the battalion's nine month tour, he spent eight attached to one of these second rate feudal desert Kingdoms.

As he was assisting in the training of recruits at their tiny depot, one of his functions was to stand on the reviewing platform, with the head of state during the recruits' passing-out ceremony. Roe didn't take much interest in the parade, he had been through it twice before, instead he was lost in thought, looking forward to leaving this hot, sandy, colourless plain, flanked on two sides by rugged colourless hills. Standing to the left and a pace behind the Sheikh, he hardly noticed the imitation clockwork British drill movements being copied on the packed-clay square to his front.

But he did shift his gaze to the thirty-odd marching men for one phase of the drills. This was when four men, one from each squad, marched forward to swear allegiance to their Monarch. That little twinge of interest probably saved his life, for instead of presenting arms, all four levelled their Lee-Enfield rifles, taking aim at the dignitaries on the raised wooden reviewing platform. Roe sparked in a flash, self-preservation propelled him forward in an angled dive seeking the protection of the low wooden railing bordering the platform. Unintentionally his right arm caught the Sheikh around the

waist, dragging the ruler to the safety of the floor with him.

As the British Captain cowed on his stomach, above him pandemonium broke out; with the Sheikh's personal secretary dead and two others of the household entourage lying wounded, pistols appeared from under robes, while personal body guards got to work with sub-machine guns. The four assassins didn't live long, going down under a hail of bullets, whereupon their bodies were taken to the town square, to be quartered and the pieces exhibited on elevated hooks, for the public to view.

Roe of course came out of it like Biggles of the desert. For so heroically saving the life of the Divine Ruler, he was given a jewel-encrusted dagger, fifty gold sovereigns and much acclaim.

Eight Platoon arrived on the scene a few days later, to escort the remainder of the recruits to prison. For although mostly innocent they had been in association with the assassins and that was condemnation enough. The journey by road from the capital to the coast took all day. It had to be British troops doing the guarding, for no local soldiers could be trusted.

On the quayside the Paratroopers watched as the alleged mutineers were crammed below the deck of a wooden dhow, for the short trip across to an island prison. There were two prisons there, one a mile up the coast, which if put into you could eventually be released from. The island prison however, was a sentence of death, once in you were thrown down a pit and there you stayed. The reason for the incident in the first place was rumoured to be something about an old dispute over fourteen goats.

CHAPTER 14

And all my days are trances,

And all my nightly dreams

Are where thy grey eye glances,

And where thy footstep gleams —

Edgar Allan Poe

Urwin, Sinclair and Kennedy found the NAAFI Club jumping, for it was a typical Saturday night in the place. On entering the packed main bar, the usual cabaret acts were taking place. Atop two separate tables a pair of challengers were performing the dance of the Flaming Assholes.

Each with a tight wad of toilet paper pushed, alight into their anus, with trousers around ankles, the squirming dance began, as the flame burned flesh, the loser was the one who removed the paper torch first. However, this contest was brought to an end by a dissatisfied spectator, who sent his full mug of bitter whistling across the room to somersault one of the half-naked performers, as it shattered off the back of his head.

A few years earlier the three men could have happily got involved in this cramped boisterous atmosphere, but now the novelty held no attraction for them. The fights, the sing-songs and all the other antics indulged in by soldiers letting off steam, they had seen before.

Downing what remained of his pint, Billy Kennedy nudged the other two nodding his head towards the street, Urwin and Sinclair finishing their beer both agreeing with his suggestion to move on. Pushing their way out of the Gun Hill entrance, a WRAC gyrating on a table top to the chants of those around her was just completing her strip-tease act.

The ‘Red Lion’ was a longish walk down Ash Road, but for peace and quiet it was well worth it. Not long after they had settled into their first drink, a party of six SNCOs from Support Company and their wives also arrived to sit as a group by the fireplace. Most knew the three Privates, and didn’t hesitate to acknowledge their presence with a wink or a nod while at the bar ordering drinks.

This was 5 Para’s first Saturday back from the gulf, and was obviously intended as a get together and night out for the wives. Some

minutes later Flo Boscombe came unescorted through the door, to be stopped by a smiling Corporal from 216 Signals Squadron. Flo, not unknown by face and reputation to most brigade wives, suddenly noticed the six women near the fireplace snickering to each other while pointing with indiscreet fingers. Flo had not once openly announced the identity of her many sleeping partners, but this time something snapped. Moving to the edge of the group she let fly at the wives.

"You sanctimonious cows, you sit there making fun of me. But just so you are all in the picture," she stormed, beginning to point one by one around the husbands, "he's been with me, he's been with me, he's been with me, he's be … ."

The area of the fireplace suddenly exploded, with men leaping to their feet, downing pints with one hand while reaching to pull speechless open-mouthed wives towards the door with the other.

In no time Flo was left beside an empty circle of chairs, still angry, but now looking as if tears were about to appear. Billy Kennedy who with the other two had watched the comical drama, jumped up to call across to her offering his seat.

"Oi Florence luv, over 'ere, what'cha drinking?"

Having taken over another one of Aldershot's old red-bricked barracks, the battalion was soon off on a month's disembarkation leave. The older single members now found themselves up against a situation that was inevitable. Having lost contact with old mates, many would be spending lonely evenings at the pub, or with their family in front of the TV.

Kennedy, Urwin, Sinclair and Reg Berrill got around this, by booking a boat for cruising on the waterways and canals of the Norfolk Broads, during their last fortnight's leave. But first they had to spend some time at home.

Reg however, took Billy Kennedy to Swindon, to enjoy their first two weeks of civilian living at his place. To start with, this was a good idea, but they didn't reckon on Reg's sister. Billy soon took a fancy to her, inviting her out drinking with them, which gradually evolved to Kennedy and her, with Reg being elbowed out. It was brought to a head one night when Reg asked to see Billy outside his house, after spending the night sat in the pub on his own watching the other two cooing in a corner.

"Look," Reg began sticking his finger under Billy's chin, "I brought you home to go out with me."

It ended with both being separated by the neighbours, after rolling around in the flower beds of the front garden, jabbing and biting each other.

Scouse Holgarth also took company home with him, Paddy Kieran and 'Armpit' Pridmore, but for a different reason — he had been done over twice while on leave and this time he wanted a little muscle with him. They were staying not at his parents' house, but several streets away with his aunt and her husband. This because Holgarth had worn out his welcome at home by constantly arguing with his father. However, during their first night in the 'Pool', this temporary abode was also put in jeopardy.

At closing time all three staggered back from the pub, screeching drunk and singing dirty songs at the top of their lungs. This would have passed off unnoticed if 'Armpit' had been sober enough to realize when to stop, instead of bursting in on the family, content in watching a late film. There he insisted on singing them several choruses of the 'Zulu Warrior'. The aunt waded in on Holgarth, demanding to know why he brought this drunken fool into the house, and he had better get shut up and into bed now, emphasizing her point by pushing Pridmore out into the hall.

It took the other two half an hour, to quiet and settle the big man into bed, before returning to the living room to make amends. Here the aunt remained livid, with the seventy-year-old granny who lived with them, shaking her walking stick at Holgarth telling him repeatedly in her brogue Irish, that he shouldn't have brought the English bastard into the house in the first place. The husband who had spent the whole of the last war in the Merchant Navy, but was now resolved to being hen-pecked and subdued by his wife for the rest of his married days, just looked on.

It took almost an hour of slurred apologising to convince the two ladies that 'Armpit' was really the salt of the earth, but had allowed the booze to get the better of him, when heavy footsteps were heard coming down the stairs.

As the clatter increased, approaching the downstairs landing a hush fell over the room. Holgarth and Kieran braced themselves, as the steps thudded about the hallway to finally pause at the living room door. This pause lasted only a second before it burst open, whereupon 'Armpit' shuffled into the room, bleary-eyed and except for his boots, bollock-naked. Pridmore half-unconscious from alcohol and sleep had been bumping from wall to wall, around the house motivated by an instinct that told his coma-trapped mind to find a toilet and relieve his bladder.

As he pushed the door open something inside him indicated that he had found it. With knees bent, leaning slightly backwards his eyes staring, unseeing, at the ceiling, he steadied his penis with both hands, shooting a golden stream of urine in a high arch over the settee, where the aunt was sitting, to ricochet in all directions off the wax-polished coffee table.

The other two Paratroopers cringed in shocked horror behind their hands, warding off the urine splashes, as the thin fountain decreased its pressure, dropping the final ribbon of stale liquid on the aunt's head and neck. Recovering with a scream, she leapt to her feet howling threats and abuse after the naked sleep walker, who now turned robot like to retrace his journey back upstairs to bed. Unexpectedly the uncle erupted in laughter, holding his sides while rocking first over one arm of his chair and then the other.

It was a struggle, but at last Holgarth and Kieran got 'Armpit' dressed to guide him. by pushing, pulling and dragging around to spend the rest of the night at Scouse's parent's house.

For three days the *Cindy II* had bumped and banged its way about the rivers and waterways of East Anglia, navigated with confident accuracy or incompetent criminal negligence, depending on how drunk the crew was. To date no damage had been done to either ship or shore, but Kennedy and Co were becoming notorious with the upheaval they caused while negotiating locks. This however, was all done in good fun, for the four would-be boatmen were intent on enjoying themselves.

Having planned this holiday for several months, first decided on in Bahrain, then booked by post from a desert-basher area on the Trucial coast, and finally confirmed in writing on a sheet of army toilet paper from a hill-top in the Radfan Mountains. Their routine was simple, steer the craft from waterside pub to waterside pub, where in between they roamed the lush green banked river systems, stripped to the waist, the deck ankle-deep in empty beer cans.

During a lunch break at one of these pubs, Dave Urwin spotted a blonde girl sitting among a group of female friends. On impulse he decided to chance his luck. With a smile he moved across to stand before her, invitingly swaying his hips, his arms held in a rumba posture as if holding a dancing partner.

"Do you fancy tripping the light fantastic?" he asked nodding towards an open area, beside a juke box that was playing one of Cliff Richards latest records. With a smile and a sharp little shake of her head she politely declined the offer. But luckily for. Dave her mates

didn't, pushing the blonde up out of her seat and into his arms.

"My name's Dave," he introduced, taking her hand to lead her across to the juke box. "What's yours?"

"Mary," she replied following his lead in taking up the beat of the dance.

What had begun as a possible quick grope and a bang under the bushes by the river bank, turned out, for Urwin to be a craving just to be in the girl's company. When the pub closed that afternoon they made a date to meet again in the evening. Then for him that was it, he was smitten. The next morning he told the others to go on, to re-collect him when they returned.

During that time he slept the nights in the pub, spending his days and evenings around at Mary's parent's house, or with her enjoying themselves together in walks and bus journeys to nearby towns. When the *Cindy II* returned it caused a loving tearful separation, with Dave promising he would be back. He kept his word, but not as many times as he would have liked, for 5 Para had just been given the wire that they were being laid on to fight another war.

The way the recently arrived new CO explained it, it seemed that the Borneo States bordering Indonesia, were now under spasmodic attacks from their neighbour. As Britain had signed defence treaties with these states, she was committed to sending troops to their aid. With no armed forces of their own to speak of, the Sultans and other governing bodies of these states gratefully accepted all offers of military help.

The CO unwittingly brought the house down with his final summing up of the situation, when he assured the battalion that this conflict would end relatively shortly, because as everyone knew the instigator of this jungle aggression, President Ahmed Sukarno, the Indonesian leader would shortly snuff it, having contracted a fatal syphilis disease. The CO had to stand blank-faced for two minutes while the men recovered themselves.

The talk had been only a warning order to the battalion, confirming their intended date of arrival for jungle training in Malaya, which was six months off. Before then another Company had to be formed, 'D' Company, for they were to train as a Special Air Service Squadron, providing much-needed assistance to that unit, who were finding it ever increasingly difficult to provide the men, who were the eyes and ears for the Intelligence gatherers of that war.

This sparked a challenge to many, for everyone knew that the ultimate pinnacle of becoming a professional soldier, was to pass the

arduous selection which would allow them to wear the coveted beige beret of the SAS. Of those that volunteered, most were free agents, single men and those married whose wives didn't mind the coming long periods of separation.

To begin with the training was geared to whittle down the large number who wished to serve in 'D' Company; and so each day would begin with a ten mile force march, up the Bourley Road, to Crookham Cross Roads, then down past the 'Foresters' pub, and back to camp, via the Fleet Road. Each day the pace was increased, causing the weak and injured to fall by the way side.

After a month of this, with the numbers now down to around a hundred and fifty officers and men, the CO dispatched them to the SAS Headquarters, to take part in the normal selection course, under the supervision of that unit's staff.

No punches were pulled, as short-handed as they were in Borneo, these men from Aldershot had volunteered to accept the high standard needed to handle an SAS patrol task, and that was what they were going to prove they were capable of doing. At five o'clock every morning, lorries would set out on a two hour journey to the Welsh Black Mountains where they would be dropped off. There, individually they would spend the rest of the day, marching from check point to check point. This may at first sound simple, but terrain and Welsh weather, the distance between check points, the time allowance, and the weight carried did not make it so.

The only way a competitor could transit the course, was by reaching every check point under the cut off time. If too late or lost, this was penalized by instant failure, with the man given a one way ticket back to Aldershot the next morning. Of those who completed, the only immediate award was the satisfaction of safely finishing that day's legs, with a two hour ride in an open vehicle back to camp, and the same to look forward to the next day.

Still there were smiles and high spirits, as those first in anxiously waited then watched in silent joy as mates appeared, stooped under a heavy Bergen pack, the rifle gripped tightly in one hand, humping determinedly down a given compass bearing. The man giving most concern to Kennedy, Sinclair and Berrill was Dave Urwin, his old injury, the compound fracture was playing him up. Since recovering he found one leg to be just a bit shorter than the other, which was possibly why he was now in some pain.

With the emphasis on fitness and the ability to navigate accurately across the country, the field again began to thin. Two officers were

vying for the position of Company Commander. Captains Chuter and Roe, both had their own individual qualities, Chuter that of leadership, courage, professionalism and of having the respect and confidence of the men; Roe could walk great distances with heavy loads.

It was said that a conspiracy was afoot to knobble Roe, but this proved unnecessary, for during the three day exercise culminating the course, finding himself cold, wet and having to overcome fatigue because of lack of sleep, he jacked. Roe was not the only one to call it a day on the final phase, of the 110 who began only seventy-eight fought their way through the physical barriers of windswept barren hill-tops, steep rocky ravines, quick sand-like bogs, and bridgeless rivers.

But the hardest task by far was that of fighting through the desire to give up, to stop, find some shelter, pull out that recently issued beautifully feather-downed sleeping bag and crash out. Urwin limped in, just under the wire after struggling slowly and painfully from check point to check point, from obstacle to obstacle. Concentrating, not on miles or hundreds of metres, but on placing one foot in front of the other.

Now that the new 'D' Company had selected its establishment, the real work began. Every member had gained a place by fitness and determination, what they needed to acquire now were new skills. The Company was to replace an SAS Squadron, this meant they were not to operate as Assault Platoons, but in four man patrols, each individual, a specialist in one role, while being cross-trained to handle at least one other.

Their schooling began as soon as they returned from a week's leave. Those who were to be Medics, were dispatched to hospitals and medical centres throughout the country, for practical experience with real casualties. Others with the assistance of 9 Squadron, and courses at the Royal Engineer demolition school, learned the techniques of explosives.

The remainder returned to Hereford, where the Special Air Service gave advanced lessons to one half in signals, and the radio they would be expected to use and maintain under jungle conditions. While the other half spent their days in classrooms, shaping their lips and tongue around unfamiliar words, for they were to be the linguists of the patrols, mastering the sing-song phraseology of the Malaya dialect.

These courses lasted for two months, then Major Chuter gathered all his men back to Aldershot. There under his direction, he

implemented a programme of training and exercises, to improve their newly-acquired skills, even finding themselves being indirectly taught things outside the normal lesson periods.

Each morning muster parade was taken not by the CSM but by one of the men appointed at random. The big catch was, he had to give all words of command in Malayan. So each morning from a little corner of Aldershot, a Chinese Muster Parade was heard taking place.

Another trick of Chuter's, was to have the Company's daily detail typed in morse code, causing pandemonium with the Company for the first week, with dozens of people turning up in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

The explosives' boys took it on themselves to sharpen everyone's demolition knowledge. Which was finally stopped by the OC, for at one stage you could hardly open a door, a locker, or sit on a toilet seat, without something going pop.

Practical experience was all important, which was why the Medics were fortunate, with the Cambridge Hospital and 23 Para Field Ambulance both ready to assist in any way possible. Bob MacIntyre found out how this was done one morning, when he reported dental sick at the centre on Knollys Road. A tooth which had been giving him some trouble was classed as unsaveable and deemed to be removed. MacIntyre not one for suffering pain willingly, barely got himself through the anaesthetic injections without cracking. But on re-entering the surgery, to be told to sit in the chair with a now numbed jaw, he was very close to panic. Hoping to calm himself, Bob closed his eyes thinking it wouldn't be so bad, if he couldn't see what was being done to him. This worked fine, until he suddenly realized the dentist was talking not to him, but to someone else.

"Look? Look?" he was saying. "That's the beast, lower right."

Opening his eyes, MacIntyre found four heads bunched a foot from his mouth, one the Army dentist, the other three Billy Kennedy, Paddy Kieran and 'Armpit' Pridmore, all three grinning like Cheshire cats. Bob made to stand up, but was halted by the dentist pushing a chromium tool in his mouth.

"There, this is how the tooth is to be gripped, then you pull upwards. But ensuring you maintain a firm hold on the tooth at all times," he instructed, then looking from face to face asked, "Now do you think you got that?"

MacIntyre watched wide-eyed as all three heads nodded.

"Good then," continued the dentist, extracting the tool, to offer it

around.

“Which one of you would like to have a go?”

“Wait a minute,” protested the patient, trying to rise from the chair, but finding himself pinned down by three sets of arms.

“Now, now,” assured the Dental Corps Captain. “This is a very simple extraction, you won’t feel a thing.”

MacIntyre never heard him. All he was aware of, was Pridmore’s hand reaching for the pliers. Realizing he was to be an unsolicited guinea pig, MacIntyre in desperation and a cold sweat, began to fight back. Clapping his mouth firmly shut, twisting his head from side to side, he struggled to break free from the three men securing him to the chair.

“Come on Bobby, stop playing silly bastards, it’s all good fun, besides that chopper’s got to come out,” giggled Billy, locking an arm around his neck.

Pridmore finding the mouth closed to him, used the fingers of his free hand to peel the lips back, tapping the now bare front teeth with the pliers.“Come on man, let me in or I’ll make a tunnel.”

Bob opening his mouth to tell Pridmore to "fuck off," realized too late he blundered, almost gagging as the extraction tool popped in. MacIntyre then froze, deciding that the best thing to do now, was let them get on with it before unnecessary damage was done.

With the dentist directing, ‘Armpit’ grasped the tooth.

“OK, that’s fine, now pull upwards.”

Pridmore did as he was told, nothing gave.

“No, you must be firmer, try again.”

The second attempt also failed.

“Right this time twist back and forth as you pull.”

Still no luck, but before the dentist could suggest another avenue of approach ‘Armpit’ who had lost patience took matters into his own hands. Planting a knee in MacIntyre’s chest, he gripped the pliers in both hands and yanked fairly dragging Bob’s head from his shoulders.

As he collapsed in sweating shock back into the chair, the dentist began explaining to his apprentices, the structure of the tooth and the reason it was so hard to dislodge. Then turning back to the chair he continued, “Now let’s have a look in there, we may need some stitches.”

MacIntyre bolted from the chair spitting blood and cursing, “If you think I’m going to have these fucking bastards anywhere near my mouth again you’re fucking bonkers.” Then jabbing two fingers upwards at all four, stormed out, swearing vengeance in the darkness of a coming night.

“Ungrateful sod,” exclaimed Billy, matching the other Paratroopers’ grins.

Dave Urwin pushed the bed sheet back to reach across, gently pinching the near nipple of his sleeping wife’s breast. Stirring lazily, her hand came up to clasp the fingers firmly around the soft mound. Unable not to respond, he arched his body above her, placing his lips around the other nipple to begin again, where they had left off only a few short hours earlier.

The wedding had been at the village church, not far from the pub where they first met. Both had hoped for a quiet affair, but gradually the number of guests increased to almost a hundred. Mostly from Mary’s side. However, his parents, eighteen-year-old sister, and his uncle, did manage to get across from Belfast. With his side of the church aisle, not looking all that out-numbered after being beefed up with, Beth and Sam Kyle, Ken Whyte with his new wife and a dozen of the lads from the Company.

What pleased him most, was Jim Sinclair as his best man, standing at the top table during the reception, reading the well-wishing telegrams confidently, and with typical north of the border wise cracking humour. He even nipped what could have been an unfortunate incident in the bud. Towards the end of the function, Paddy Kieran in a drunken inspiration began to sing ‘Danny Boy’. Jim was just able in time to shut him up, dragging him off to a corner as Dave’s uncle began to shed his jacket.

Urwin and his wife had two happy weeks in Folkestone, mostly in their hotel room, but they did interrupt their love-making for an excursion up to London shopping, and a day trip across the Channel to Boulogne. This was costing the young couple a bomb, but it didn’t matter, shortly ‘D’ Company would be off to the Far East, not expecting to return for at least eight months, so they intended making the most of the short time they were having together.

Sam Kyle punched his pillow, throwing it behind his head to await Beth’s return. It was 0700 on a Friday morning and he was looking forward to another two weeks of leave, which the whole battalion was having prior to setting out on its tour of duty in Borneo.

“Here it’s for you,” said Beth carrying the reason they had both been awakened.

Sam reached out for the telegram, beginning to open it as Beth again returned to the bed, snuggling up beside him.

“Oh for Christ sake,” he exclaimed flopping his arms to his side as he stared up in despair at the ceiling.

“Why what is it?” asked his wife taking the message sheet from his hand. There she found only one word ‘Athens’, meaning nothing to her. Sam had to explain that it was one of the 5th Battalion’s battle honours from the Second World War, but was now being used as the code word to recall the battalion back from leave. It seems the fighting in Borneo had escalated, requiring reinforcements in a hurry. Within a week 5 Para had moved from Aldershot to Malaya.

Most of the Battalion had never been to this part of the world before, it was just not one of 16 Para Brigade’s stamping grounds. UK. Mediterranean, North West Europe, African or Arabian Deserts, they could handle any type of training or operation in those areas, but the jungles of South East Asia, that is something they would have to be taught by the experts.

The experts were not to be found in Singapore where they first landed. Instead, to reach the jungle warfare school to begin training, first meant a two hour journey by truck across the island’s causeway, then up into the Malayan Peninsula. This, for most, was a vocational treat; the sights, sounds and smells were even better than the cinema travelogue. Only once — when the populated areas of Singapore and Jahor-Baharu had been replaced with monotonous miles of rubber plantation, stretching from the road’s edge into the distance — did inquisitive interest wane.

At an insignificant junction an hour later, all vehicles turned up a narrow road leading into a small valley, two hundred metres wide by a quarter of a mile long. Set like bungalows in neat rows, but stepping in tiers up the hillside were twenty or so open-sided huts with corrugated tin roofs. Across the valley were a similar number, and more could be seen in an adjoining jungle-flanked vale.

This was Palada Camp, the British Army’s jungle warfare training centre, the huts being the living accommodation, stores and classrooms of the school. The battalion was to be given six weeks here, in which to master the technique of this new type of warfare; of that six seeks, very little time would be spent in the plush comfort of these bare huts.

Having completed hanging his mosquito net over his cot bed, Sam Kyle began a tour of the platoon hut, to see that everyone was settling in without problems. It should not have been necessary, but there had been a recent arrival of new men to the platoon, who had to be shown the ropes. Because so many of the older experienced members of the platoon had left for 'D' Company, Support Company or de-mob he was compelled to get amongst them, putting their mistakes right.

"When you smokers go to the NAAFI tonight," he called out so everyone could hear, "Bring an empty beer can back, fill it with a little water and use it as an ash tray."

"No Peters, don't hang your equipment at the top of the bed, put it at the bottom like the rest of us."

"Here Starbrook," he continued stopping to nudge some loose kit with the toe of his boot, "get this put away."

'Jesus,' he thought, 'here we are going to war, with a batch of teenage kids, most not being in the Army more than nine months.' How he wished he had more of the old Radfan crew back.

The only good point about 8 Platoon at the moment were the section Commanders. Bob MacIntyre recently promoted to Lance Corporal had taken over 1 Section, and Ken Whyte after failing 'D' Company selection through contracting a bout of flu during the Wales phase, returned to 3 Section.

Sam had been upset with Ken when he left, for there were moves afoot to give him his third stripe, taking over the job of 8 Platoon's Sergeant. Instead Bruley was given his lift up to Colour Sergeant and moved on, to be replaced by Sandy McLeod, a hard-drinking, unhelpful, ill-tempered, east coast Scotsman.

This was bad enough, but could have been tolerated if the Platoon Commander had been of a strong character, unfortunately for 8 this was not the case. Second Lieutenant Simon Austen was a boy, weak and immature. The only reason he tried so hard and won a Commission in the Parachute Regiment was because he was desperate to prove to his family and public school chums that he wasn't really the useless misfit everyone thought. Why, with a red beret on his head, they could now see how wrong they were about him.

For the first few days, the whole battalion was led by the hand through the basics of surviving in the tropics. Taking Palladrin tablets every day to ward off malaria, never drinking jungle water unless it was first boiled or treated with purification tablets, how to correctly lace the rubber and canvas jungle boot which would keep out the leeches, and how to erect shelters and hammocks, or prepare a piece

of ground for sleeping on. These and a thousand other minor and major points were passed on by the school staff, and this was before they even began to cover the warfare side of the training.

Two full periods were spent on snakes, explaining the types, how lethal they were, and what to do about them. This was not Billy Kennedy's favourite subject, he knew he wasn't too keen on creepy crawlies and things that slithered on their bellies. For he had put the fear of Christ up himself, when he took a quick butchers in the Natural History Museum during his last weekend at home.

After twenty minutes walking around the stuffed reptile section he left pale and shaken, many were big and all looked hungry.

One live exhibit the school had was an six metre King Cobra. It was kept in a sealed enclosure, with a thick perspex viewing window. This was necessary, for unlike most snakes who if disturbed will slink away, the King Cobra had a natural mean aggressive streak that compelled it to attack all corners.

The first to discover the reality of this was Sid Reed. One night after swilling down several cans of 'Tiger' beer at the NAAFI, he stopped to tease the King Cobra. Kneeling in front of its window he repeatedly made faces, gesturing with his fingers and sticking his tongue out, inciting the snake to heights of agitation.

Swaying angrily back and forth, with its hood fully flared it rushed several times at the drunken human, striking the plastic to leave little streams of venom trickling down the window. Finally provoked beyond endurance, the reptile raced the ten metres from the far end of its enclosure to strike with suicidal force.

Reed crouched six inches the other side of the window his tongue out, thumbs held either side of his head waggling his fingers in mock comedy, suddenly found the Cobra's smashed and bleeding head draped across one shoulder. The whole camp heard the scream, but no one discovered the cause until next morning, when the dead serpent was found hanging through the broken perspex.

Reed was picked up at dawn halfway to Jahor-Baharu having run in a blind panic most of the way.

Two Section sat in a straight line behind Sam Kyle as he studied his map, checking their line of march with his compass. He desperately wanted to be right on his navigation, for he had a very serious problem facing him. Of the eight men in his section only he and the rear man, his gunner 'Jonesy' Jones were capable of seeing, the other six were totally blind. Three days earlier every section in the Company

had set out on its own, having been given a grid reference where they would all join up again. This was to have been the novice Paratroopers' initiation in moving and living in the jungle.

On the morning of the second day, one of the men complained of grittiness in his eyes, within an hour he couldn't see, his eye-lids sealed and painful to attempt opening. This was not serious, for guided by a mate they could all have rejoined the Company as intended that evening. However, by noon two others had contracted it, and then a third. This slowed their progress, forcing them to spend an extra night on their own.

By morning Sam had the seven cases, with things beginning to look desperate. He had two thousand metres to go, which normally would have meant two hours' travelling. But not now, not at the pace he and the others had to move.

Each fallen log was an obstacle, every stream a major problem, while hanging strings of 'wait-a-while", with their barbed hooks had to be avoided, or the whole procession would be stopped as he or 'Jonesy' disentangled the helpless man who had been caught up. There were no roads or paths, the route Kyle was following was straight line compass bearings, with nothing to check his position on except water courses or ground contours.

Sam pushed his map into the pocket on the leg of his olive green trousers, to check his compass bearing, before with some encouraging remarks, he got everyone up to follow him through the denseness of the surrounding green vegetation. With one hand holding the pack of the man in front they moved, stopping periodically while Kyle or Jones assisted them one at a time past an obstruction.

With less than a thousand metres to go, Sam was beginning to feel a little more confident, considering the recent vision he had of him and his men sitting in the jungle, alone and blind, waiting for death. Pushing a branch to one side he turned his head to crack a joke, then turning back was struck in the face by another unnoticed limb. Thinking nothing of it, he moved on, but that limb was the trigger, soon his eyes began to feel sandy and itch, then his vision blurred.

Stopping the column, fighting the fear and terror that was in danger of overwhelming him, he called Jones to him. Speaking with a nonchalance he didn't feel, he handed his gunner the map and compass, "Jonesy, I got it now."

Then, delivering vital instructions handed over the responsibility of his command. "We haven't far to go only another two hundred paces on bearing 3850 mils, then we must turn north for another nine

hundred on 5980, this should bring us into the Company in about an hour. You think you can handle it?"

"Sure Sam no problem, I'll get us in," came a cheery reply.

"Yeah Jonesy, I know you can," confirmed Kyle handing over his rifle to take the other's machine gun.

Then catching hold of the rear man's pack as he passed, began what he hoped would be the last leg of this nightmare journey. It took an hour and a half, but at last chopping could be faintly heard, which soon led them into 9 Platoon's basher area.

CSM Allander came with the Company Medic as soon as he heard the news. Soon after which, convincing Griffin that a helicopter was needed to get these men to hospital. As it turned out a spell in hospital wasn't necessary, instead the Battalion MO bedded them all down in their billet under treatment. He did mention what the complaint was, but no one could remember how to pronounce it. Although painful as well as blinding, thankfully within a few days everyone was cured, being assured it was a rare complaint with little chance of it occurring again. This was not the happiest of introduction to jungle training.

Meanwhile back in the jungle, 'C' Company were putting into practice some of the drills and procedures they had been taught. So confident was the OC that he directed the Company's Second-in-Command Captain Roe to lay on a demo for the Colonel.

Roe half-heartedly planned out an ambush and personally sited the men in it. Bob MacIntyre disputed the position of his gun group, who were supposed to be one of the cut-offs when he found them sitting on the opposite side of the track, almost facing the killer group, but was told to leave it where it was.

Although Roe was standing beside him when Griffin escorted the CO around, it was the Lance Corporal who was left stammering and stuttering like Porky Pig, as the CO asked him why his machine gun was pointing towards the killer group.

Roe's incompetence didn't end there. A week later he devised a night river-crossing exercise, designed to test each of the Company's platoons.

Eight Platoon was the first to have a go at this. All keyed up to get it right, they began by putting out flank protection parties, then securing a line to the far bank, by one of the platoon swimming with it across the river's sixty metres. Once their equipment had been made into individual flotation bundles by tying their ponchos around it, the platoon set off in small groups, weapons slung over shoulders, pulling

themselves along the line, while pushing the bundle.

In the middle of the river, one of Ken Whyte's young Privates lost hold of his bundle, and began to swim after it, in an attempt to recover his belongings now drifting away on the current. Ken seeing he was in trouble, let his own bundle go until he had helped the young lad back to the line, then struck out downstream to retrieve his own kit — he never returned.

His disappearance wasn't noticed for an hour, whereupon by then nothing could be done, for as their sarcastic Platoon Sergeant put it, "If he's no ashore by now he's meat for the fishies."

That might be the case, but if so then he was partly responsible.

Roe supervised the exercise, but when they found no safety boat or a second rope strung downstream, it was up to him and the Platoon Commander to cancel the crossing until this had been rectified.

Sam Kyle was livid with rage, taking it on his own bat to cross and re-cross the river three times, trying to penetrate the thick tangle of overhangs that grew out from either bank, looking for a route downstream, but it was hopeless. When Griffin heard what happened, he had to be dragged off Roe, whose throat he had in both hands, by Allander and the new Company CQMS 'Tuck' Friar.

'D' Company under Major Chuter jumped his men in at the deep end, moving out to a secluded base camp, in the heart of inaccessible jungle. Helicoptered in and helicopter supplied, they stayed there for five weeks, with the patrols being worked up on a series of ever increasingly harder tasks. The patrols were commanded by the senior rank, be he an officer or NCO.

6 Patrol, Jim Sinclair, Reg Berrill and Billy Kennedy had a Sergeant in charge of them. He a dark-haired, serious-minded, heavy-set rugby playing Welshman. All three respected his qualities of command, but found his constant, mute, withdrawn nature uncomfortable, and out of place in a tightly knit self-reliant set up like theirs. For living as close to each other as they did day after day, for weeks at a time, comradeship had to be a prime factor.

Jungle, one found very early on, you either liked or hated. If you liked it, you only saw its wonders and botanical beauty. If a hater, all that was seen and unhappily tolerated was the slime, the insects, the rain, the leeches, the smell and the rest of its volume thick discomforts.

Reg was a hater, constantly lifting his arm to smell the sewer fragrance that increased each day, until finally losing all trace through

the human body, blending with the surrounding stink.

Jim Sinclair on the other hand, took a shine to the jungle's green denseness, and its lively environment first off. Happy to lie alone on radio watch or sentry, and be fascinated by birds, small mammals and insects in their day to day survival. Both amused and bewildered by an unending column of ants, inches wide, marching down out of one tree, then across to disappear up another, and at each dusk watch in amazement the ability of the evening bats as they zoomed and dived at fantastic speed, through the tightly bunched saplings and growths, picking from the air, insects and fire flies with computed accuracy.

Sinclair and the others would have to have such diversions, because the life of a jungle soldier was not a comfortable one.

First you were always wet, either from rain, river or sweat, your loads were always heavy with rations, ammunition, radio batteries, explosives and much more, never less than eighty pounds was always bulging from their large canvas Bergens.

Health had to be monitored very carefully, for a cut or a sudden chill could result in a man becoming a liability, either to be escorted out to a safe location or delaying an operation while a helicopter site was found or cleared. This was very nearly the case with Billy Kennedy, when 6 patrol found themselves faced with yet another river to cross.

Stripping off he dived in, with the crossing line, as he had done twice before that day. But this time it seemed to be a struggle, something was holding him back. Just as he was reaching for a tree root on the far bank, the others saw him suddenly disappear below the water. Reg froze for a few seconds, hoping to see him reappear, then with a heave began to pull the line in.

"Taff! Taff!" he called, "It's fouled, I can't budge it."

The other two men rushed to grab the line, but to no avail, somewhere under the water, a knot had tied. Miraculously Kennedy's head surfaced four metres from the nearside shore. Seeing this Jim Sinclair released the rope, springing in a head long dive towards his friend. The river was not wide, but it was deep and flowing fast.

Billy had again gone, with Jim going down after him into the river's muddy depths. When his hand brushed a face he grabbed out taking hold of Kennedy's hair, then struggled for the surface. On the bank they laid him out, while Lewis pulled his mouth open intending to give resuscitation, but finding it full of sand, leaves and mud, began instead to dig it out with his fingers. Sinclair anxiously watched for several moments. Then noticing Billy becoming blue in the face

quickly stepped in, pulling him to his feet, ordering Reg to hold him up, while with all his strength he drove a solid right hand punch into Kennedy's *solar plexus.*

This was a desperate attempt on the Scotsman's part but it worked, the little remaining air still in Kennedy's lungs was bellowed out his nose and mouth, dislodging the obstruction in a filthy spew. Dropping at Berrill's feet, coughing, spluttering and sucking in gulps of air, he looked up to thank his mates with a series of nods and a weak smile.

The only other event that occurred outside of the routine drudge and sweat of this their last training patrol was a shocker.

'Taff' Lewis spotting a fallen tree running parallel to his compass bearing, led the other three up onto it. The jungle being difficult to tread at the best of times, this fifty metres of straight clear surface was well welcomed. It wasn't until they approached the end of the trunk that the route proved ill advised, for out of the leafy canopy a few feet above their heads came a heavy vibrating hiss, that numbed the senses with fear, paralysing the four soldiers in their tracks.

"Steady boys! Steady! Don't panic!" ordered the Sergeant in a low commanding voice without turning his head. "Now, slowly back up, no sudden moves mind you."

But 'Taff' could have saved his breath, he was talking to himself. The other three were back at the far end of the tree, watching him shuffling backwards along the trunk, expecting at any moment to see an eighteen inch drain pipe with head and scales, drop out of the branches to scoop their Patrol Commander away for 'din-dins'. The detour made that afternoon was long and wide, for all agreed that, although unseen, whatever was up there certainly sounded big.

The Commanding Officer without doubt, a hard professional soldier, dedicated to squeezing every possible second of training out of his men in preparation for their coming Borneo commitment, also appreciated that his troops were only human. With that in mind, he arranged two days' leave for this battalion.

Most of the seven hundred thirst-crazed, randy Paratroopers took their forty-eight hours in Singapore, where many began by first downing the contents of 'Tiger' brew cans at the large NAAFI Club, before striking out into the flesh pots.

Paddy Kieran, Billy Kennedy and Reg Berrill cut their drinking in the club short, when 'Armpit' became loud and boisterous, leading him outside in search of another field of entertainment.

As the others tried to flag a taxi, the big man leaned against a stone pillar, but spotting something that took his fancy he set off upright, though unsteadily, through the traffic to cross the road. Halting, he watched for some seconds the side street snake charmer, playing his pipe as the cobra's erect hooded head swayed gently within its basket to the drone of the high-pitched notes.

Kieran who had stopped a cab, shouted to Pridmore twice, but on being ignored, started across the street to fetch him. Paddy after stopping to watch, in shocked amazement, what 'Armpit' had just done, sprinted to his side, then locking one of his arms dragged him back to the taxi. For the mischievous giant, with an impish grin had reached down grabbing the snake in both hands like a loaf of French bread, then with three quick bites severed the thing in half.

The little old Indian snake charmer, in soiled turban, loin cloth and sandals chased the taxi for two blocks, but gave up in hopping, arm waving rage at a main junction.

"Pridmore cut that stuff out! You'll get us all put away," warned Paddy, his finger poked under the big man's nose. 'Armpit' just grinned, his jaw working up and down, chewing the last of his scaly-skinned snack.

As the night began Reg Berrill got the word there was a live show to be seen, so with the aid of a taxi driver, the four men found themselves being led through the dark, down alleys, across back gardens and around buildings to a wooden, corrugated tin roofed shanty structure.

Inside they found a small amphitheatre packed with about a hundred noisy men, mostly either 5 para or American servicemen on their 'R and R' leave from Vietnam. Being the last to enter, the only seats to be found were on the top tiers high in the roof. The others steadied Pridmore up the climb, for he had drunk the most, and was least capable of putting two steps together that went the same direction.

The show got under way, from a stage which had only one prop, a bed, by a Chinese girl doing a conventional strip-tease. Once naked a coffee-skinned male, also naked appeared to slide his stiff penis in and out of her, using a dozen different positions to finally come, aided by the girl's lips and hands, squirting his semen over her face and breasts.

The next performers were another two Chinese girls, who began a lesbian act. When well into it, with one girl lying on the bed her legs dangling over the edge, the other crouched between them, her tongue sliding up and down the other's bare sex, a shrill animal howl

suddenly filled the room.

All during the show there had been a constant stream of false moans and impatient remarks from the audience, but now everyone was stilled, as heads turned to the man who had silenced them.

It was 'Armpit', through the effects of drink he had nodded off before the show began, but now awakening to find this ultra-sexual aspiration before him, staggering to his feet he stumbled, arms outstretched like Frankenstein's monster, down the steps to the stage, where he pulled the kneeling girl away, to take her place, working his tongue like a thirst-parched dog lapping at a pail of water.

After this no one called him 'Armpit' any more, from that evening he was known as 'Muffer'.

Most spent that night either drinking with mates or sleeping with whores or girls they had picked up in Boogie street bars. You had to be careful in some of these red light areas, for a lot of transvestites known as 'Ki-tis' would try to dupe the unsuspecting. They were not as simple to detect as one might think, for most were very femininely attractive with real or silicone breasts. It wasn't until the hand reached between the legs to find itself gripping a fist full of bollocks, that the truth was known. At that stage of the game many settled for what they had, finding an anus satisfied sexual needs in much the same as the genuine article.

Dave Urwin and Jim Sinclair had intended to spend all the first day shopping, but this soon disintegrated into a bar crawl. On the final night having missed the battalion's laid-on three tonners, they found themselves walking up the main road back to the jungle school. At three in the morning a taxi raced past them to screech to a stop, then zig-zagging dangerously reversed back.

"Hi Dave want a lift?" came a drunken voice from the area of the driver's seat.

Looking in they found half of their old platoon crammed like sardines: legs, arms, and beer cans everywhere.

"No thanks Jack I don't need a lift in a stolen car just now," replied Urwin.

"What do you mean stolen, we ain't nicked this, the driver's here somewhere," protested Jack Burrows the Platoon Signaller.

"Yeh sure he is," came a voice from the back.

"I'm sittin' on his head."

“I think you’re right Dave,” agreed Sinclair, “As I remember Jack here can’t drive.”

“Drive! Drive!” came Burrows’ indignant response, “I’m not driving, I’m only steering, Jonesy’s working the pedals and Tommy Starbrook’s got the gear lever. Now if you blokes can’t trust that then you deserve to walk.”

“Yeh, safe as houses,” agreed Sinclair, then looking at Urwin, “What do you think?”

"We'd better. I can’t see us making first parade any other way,” reluctantly ventured the Irishman as he pulled a rear door open to demand, “But I want a beer first. If I’m going to go it’s got to be painlessly.”

“Here! Corporal MacIntyre, get oot-o-yer pit, you have a wee task to perform.”

The Lance Corporal opened his eyes to see who it was spoiling his afternoon snooze. Through the mosquito netting he saw and felt Sergeant McLeod prodding his foot.

“Come on mon, wake up you’ve got a job on. They found your mate’s carcass up the coast and we need someone to fetch it.”

Bob forcing the dopiness from his mind pushed the netting aside and stood up.

“Sorry Sarge, what’s this, you want me to go somewhere?” he asked still unclear.

“Yes I do,” replied the Sergeant rocking forward to engulf the Lance Corporal in whisky fumes.

“Corporal Whyte, his body has been found and you are to go get it. Now report to the helipad in ten minutes, Colour Sergeant Friar will be expecting you. Do you understand me now?”

“Yes sergeant, got it.” Then calling after the Scotsman who was making for the door asked, “Where did you say he’s been found?”

McLeod stopped, turning to answer in an exasperated tone, “I told you, up the coast somewhere,” then changing his expression to a smile, elaborated. “Some slant-eyed fisherman hauled him in, in his net, what a shock that yellow bastard must have had eh! Ha ha ha ….”

Bob didn’t bother replying, the remark and the man didn’t merit the breath.

MacIntyre would have preferred not to go; collecting the body of a

stranger yes — a friend no. But he knew he had little choice. It was the second day of the battalion's leave, with none of the Company remaining in camp except Friar, who was handing over his stores ready for the move out, and himself who had been on duty the day before as the Company Orderly Sergeant. The only reason McLeod was in camp was because of the cheap whisky to be drunk in the Senior NCO Mess. Picking up his beret and olive green shift Bob turned for the door.

The rear doors of the Scout helicopter where MacIntyre sat had been removed to allow the coffin, on the return journey to be stowed. Bob with cold rushes of air beating against him was soon aware that Whyte's coffin, when it was loaded would take up such space, as to allow him nowhere to put his legs except across its top.

After an hour's flight the pilot set the aircraft down on a grass lawn, in a clean well laid-out bungalow and palm-treed Western coastal town. The smart whitewashed masonry building they landed next to was the district police station, where they were taken by a Malaysian policeman, in a smartly turned out khaki short-trousered uniform. He then escorted them across a courtyard at its back, to a low, cool, stone building which was the police mortuary. In a white-tiled room, the head mortician stopped beside several coffins set out in a single row.

"Well?" asked 'Tuck' impatient to be away, sweeping a hand over the line, "Which one is it?"

"Oh no he is not in any of these," replied the bespectacled Chinese mortician politely, "This is your friend here."

His hand pointed to a plain wooden box no bigger than an apple crate.

"What?" retorted 'Tuck', "This can't be him, this is a nipper's coffin."

Then being sure of himself, turned the lid back for conformation. A moment later MacIntyre was bowled to one side by Friar screaming dementedly, his face a horror-stricken mask as he charged past him for the entrance. Bobby recovering his balance watched, now unnerved as the Colour Sergeant disappeared across the courtyard, still screeching an unholy shrill. Then turning to the opened box he tentatively peered in, to be stunned simultaneously by revulsion and shock. Staring up at him was an eyeless head attached to a partial shoulder. the flesh puffy and white was in places missing as if bitten away. The main areas of this were the ears and nose. But also the lips, which bared the teeth to a grotesque leer. This was Ken though, there

was no mistaking his brown curly hair.

The pilot gently laying a hand on his shoulder, told Bob to bring the box out to the helicopter. MacIntyre closing the lid on the small coffin, picked it up in his arms, to walk slowly towards the courtyard.

At the helicopter the pilot produced a bottle of brandy, which he handed to him, but before he could reach for it, ‘Tuck’ Friar, who had been vomiting against a palm tree, snatched it from the Air Corps Lieutenant’s hand, to gulp the liquid down.

The return journey, Friar spent in the back, pale and sick, while Bob MacIntyre sat in the co-pilot’s seat, the remains of his friend balanced on his lap, the expression on his face set and unemotional, but from each eye tears continually ran.

CHAPTER 15

Through the Jungle very softly flits a shadow and a sigh

He is Fear, O Little Hunter, he is Fear!

Rudyard Kipling

Standing at the entrance to the command bunker of Charlie company's newly allocated defensive location, Ron Allander couldn't believe his eyes, he was appalled at the state it was in. Of the few minutes it had taken him to walk from the helicopter pad to the position's ridge-top, everywhere he looked indicated that the Company they were relieving had lacked either the will, or ability to carry out the basic fundamental rules of military maintenance and hygiene.

The position two hundred metres by one hundred and fifty, commanded by a dominant ridge twenty-five metres high, that ran for over half its length, was bare, having previously been cleared of all trees and vegetation. The boundary of this defence was secured by several rows of concertina barbed wire. While out from that for another fifty metres, everything had been cut to provide fields of fire.

At the fringe of this network of stumps, felled trees, and low shrubbery, rose the Borneo jungle, lush and unwelcoming. Here like a huge green wall, trees, some so high they looked down on the Company's ridge-top command post and whose branches spread out to interlock, weaving a canopy over the jungle floor below, where despite the absence of sunlight, things still grew thick and fast, which restricted the passage of men to single-file movement, bobbing, side-stepping, ducking, sometimes crawling in order to force a passage which very soon closed behind.

The CSM placing his Bergen and kit bag in a bunker, that was to be his sleeping accommodation, turned, rifle in hand, for a quick informal tour of the position. On the ridge-top he walked from one end to the other, then back again assessing the location's layout and the state it was in.

The ridge itself was crowned by a single communication trench which, if stood in, a man could look down to the position below to either side. Also on the crest of this long knoll were three bunkers, one the command post, the other two living accommodation. At the base of the ridge were more communication trenches, defensive points and accommodation bunkers, all set just back from the wire that circled

the whole area.

At the northern end of the position, where the ridge sloped down to level ground, was the administration area. Here was the cooks' tent, containing their pots, pans, hay boxes, and two banks of petrol-fired cooking burners, the Army's tried and proven field stoves. Next door was the Company Stores which Colour Sergeant Friar was in the process of taking over. Flanking this, across a narrow dirt track was the much used clay-surfaced helicopter pad.

The track which led out through a fenced gateway, with sandbagged sentry posts each side, extended for only a hundred metres, down to the location's water supply — a nearby stream. This track was solely used by the one and only vehicle in the position, a Land Rover, that dragged the cooks' water bowser up and down at least once each day. Of other wheeled vehicle roadways there were none, not for fifty miles.

'C' Company's new home, like dozens of other posts spread along Malaysia's south-eastern borders of Sabah and Sarawak, facing Indonesia's Kalimantan provinces of Borneo, was completely isolated. The only forms of travel were by foot over jungle trails, by canoe along rivers, or above it by air. Rations and other supplies for the Company came in on only one of these routes, carried by the most vital of all modern day jungle fighting machines, the helicopter.

At the OC's orders conference that evening, Allander raised the point of the disgraceful state the previous unit left the position in, and suggested a programme for putting it right. 'Knocker' agreed the place was in shit-order, and that those crap-hat bastards were a bunch of wankers. Then once he had briefed his platoon and Detachment Commanders on their tasks, arcs of responsibility and given a detailed forecast of coming events, he cautioned them to warn their men, that the CSM would be using every man not out on patrol or operations, for putting this location right.

It took almost a month, starting with basic area cleaning, that of picking up the litter and rubbish left scattered about, working through the filling in of unhygienic DTLs and digging of new ones, to the re-siting of the cook tent, also in a filthy state.

Defence wise, there was much to do as well, the two mortar pits were moved from the east side of the ridge to the west. This to give them the shelter of the high ground from any attack, which it was presumed would come directly from across the Indonesian border to the east. Some fire trenches and bunkers also proved to be badly sited, and were re-dug elsewhere. The barbed wire perimeter fence took up

a lot of man hours, with mending, replacing, expanding and closing, then strengthening gaps that had been allowed to slide into disrepair.

The final phase was a long and tedious one, the men called it their allotment, for gardening it was, but what a deadly crop. In a twenty metre belt around the outside of the wire, bamboo pangi stakes were planted. These had to be gathered from the jungle, cut, sharpened, then the point hardened over a fire. At the finish the men were on their chin straps. Those in camp worked from stand-to, to stand-to, every day, week in, week out. It was a relief to get out into the jungle on patrols or to lay ambushes.

An ambush was what 8 Platoon were given to do shortly after their arrival. The Company's three platoons began operations by working in weekly rotation. One would provide the locations guards and fatigue-parties, another would be on stand-by, ready to move at a moment's notice, either to respond in sections or as a platoon to whatever the emergency may be. The third would place reconnaissance patrols and ambush parties out among the hills and footpaths of the border. These would last for two or three days, only returning to the Company position to pick up food and ammunition.

With Sergeant MacLeod and Bob MacIntyre working to the north of them, as two separate recce parties, Lieutenant Austen with Sam Kyle picked their way by compass south to a pre-selected ambush position. Their journey had not been pleasant, this because of the actions of Mr Austen. Being his first command in the face of the enemy so to speak, he had become jumpy and irresponsible.

As the leader he should have been calm and assured, setting an example to the men, instead he put them on edge by blowing shushes up and down the line of soldiers every time they caused a noise. The drill in the jungle is that no one talks above a whisper; if commands must be passed the British Army had devised an elaborate but simple sequence of hand signals, which got all messages passed.

As for moving quietly this was a priority, but in the jungle it was difficult to walk about without making some noise — brushing a tree, stepping on dry leaves, breaking twigs — all you could do was minimize it as much as possible. Austen though, overcome with the responsibility and fear of the enemy, could not see he was making more noise with his constant shushing, than ever the men were.

Sam bringing up the rear, like everyone else was very close to lamping this immature pillock, but thankfully the location of the ambush was reached first, whereupon the fifteen men after dropping their packs, with him and his small reserve support party, melted into

the green surroundings to take up their pre-arranged positions beside a jungle track.

However, even there, there was no reprieve — lying still is not an easy thing, legs and arms become numbed and cramped, movement of some sort must be made to relieve the agony. This, like a paranoid librarian, had Austen, lying in the centre of the killer group, shushing first to his left, then his right.

Looking as if this was going to go on for ever. Phil Peters normally a good-natured easy going West Country lad from Bridgewater, blew a fuse. With a metal mess tin in each hand he jumped onto the track, to stand in the centre of the ambush killing ground beating the two aluminium pans together while shouting at the top of his voice:

"Shush" — bang!

"Fucking" — clang!

"Shush!" — clang!

"Stick" — bang!

"Your" — ping!

"Fucking" — bang!

"Shush" — clang!

"Up" — bong!

"Your" — clang!

"Fucking" — ping!

"Ass!"

It didn't take Sam long to tumble what had happened, he had been suffering the constant faint, but distinctive shushing for the last hour just like the rest. Leaping to his feet he walked quickly to the ambush shouting a warning as he approached. There Austen was almost in tears, his lower lip quivering.

"Corporal Kyle! Corporal Kyle I want that man charged."

"Not now Sir, we have to move," replied the Corporal brushing the Lieutenant's order aside. Then in a loud command, he called the ambush off, counting the men through as he directed them back to collect their packs.

That night, after harbouring up, well away from their aborted ambush, little sniggers and chuckles were heard drifting out of individual sleeping areas, even Sam found himself having to bite his

lip several times.

As unpredictable as the jungle is, there is one thing you can always rely on, it will never be silent. The wind in the trees, the rain, the dripping of water and the cries of unseen animals — but above all the shrill and whine of the insects. All this day and night, it was unending and at times unnerving. This constant low key din was having an anxious effect on Paddy Kieran, not because of the sounds, but what they could be hiding. Crouched beside a tree trying to conceal himself as much as possible, he was listening and watching with every ounce of his perception.

The day before, the patrol had been spying out a native Kampong across the Indonesian side of the border. They had felt there was something unusual about the place, but couldn't safely approach it for a proper look-see. In desperation the patrol commander, a Corporal slipped in at night with 'Muffer' Pridmore, while Kieran and Dave Urwin remained at the jungle's edge providing a rear cover party. The upshot of this was they were right, the place was an armed camp, but the patrol commander paid for his perseverance. On their way out of the village, a sentry let fly with a sub-machine gun, lodging a low velocity bullet in the calf of his leg.

They were able to make a getaway up a track leading back to the border, but after half a mile this was decided to be too dangerous, seeking instead the protection of the jungle for the remainder of the night. The next morning the Patrol Commander in pain, but able to walk, set them a compass bearing for the friendly side of the border, where he could safely have his injury attended to.

This changed dramatically, when at 1400 hours, while pausing for lunch and to send their daily situation report, Urwin the patrol signaller received a warning. The Indonesians, like the British were using the local Aboriginal tribesmen as trackers and guides. The deciphered code told them, Intelligence sources were positive, their trail leading from the village had been picked up by these enemy trackers, and that they were now closing in on them.

There was no need to discuss the issue, a laid down operational procedure covered that. Pulling a map from his trouser pocket to trace a finger on, the Corporal, after a pause looked up directing his orders at Urwin.

"Right Dave, send Zebra Three, when they acknowledge pack your radio up and bring it, but dump the rest of your kit." Then heaving himself up to a standing position with the aid of his rifle, told the other two, "Leave your Bergens we'll travel with belt order only."

Then stripped of everything except ammo pouches, water bottles, some iron rations, their rifles and the radio, they set out for an emergency helicopter pick-up point.

Three hours later with dusk only an hour away, they made their destination, an old overgrown helipad.

Paddy with a sharpness acquired through an ill-spent youth, in the fields and hedgerows of his native Wicklow, spotting gamekeepers before they spotted him, sensed a faint movement through the vegetation. Turning slowly to Dave Urwin ten metres away behind a fallen tree trunk, he signalled with a closed thumbs down fist, this as a silent hand signal indicated enemy. Urwin who had left his radio back on the landing pad, switched on so it was now sending out a constant signal as a homing beacon, gripped his rifle placing a finger gently over the trigger.

Suddenly Kieran snapped his weapon up to fire a single shot. Urwin stared looking hard for the target, then he too began to notice fleeting movement, a sudden appearance of shadow, a flickering of colour. He waited until a pale brown patch of cloth halted, then focusing the tip of his foresight onto it, squeezed the trigger. He had no time to congratulate himself on the pained yell that followed, for more shadowy movement was spreading to their left and right. With returning bullets now stripping leaves and branches above their heads, both men aimed and fired, determined to hold them back.

At the clearing, the patrol commander looked at his watch, the chopper was ten minutes late, but above the vibrating rifle fire echoing from the jungle, he could hear the dull rhythmical beat of a Scout helicopter. This he thought to himself was going to be close. In the dash to reach this emergency pad, he had pushed himself to the limit. Even with the bleeding controlled by Pridmore's recent application of a fresh shell dressing, he knew the leg could no longer hold his weight, he either went out here or not at all. As the sound of the helicopter increased Pridmore pulled a smoke grenade from his ammo pouch, then dislodging the pin, threw it to the centre of the clearing.

Holes in the jungle were few and far between, so these cornered men were taking no chances. The pilot on finding the gap in this endless green roof with the help of the tell-tale yellow smoke, side slipped his hovering machine to begin a vertical descent to the jungle floor. With sensitive controlling of his stick and foot pedals, he gingerly guided the craft down, conscious that the space between his rotor blades and the tree limbs was restricted to scant few metres. Without a word, for the noise of the engine was too great, Pridmore

pulled his Corporal up onto his back in a fireman's lift with one clean movement, then carrying their two rifles in one hand, he loped across to the helicopter to heave his load through the open door of the rear compartment.

Urwin and Kieran were slowly giving ground, with the chopper now here they knew they could do this, but it was also one of necessity for the Indos were trying to get behind them. By leap-frogging each other in twenty metre sprints they were able to keep the enemy at bay. Urwin halted his final bound at the edge of the clearing, to see Pridmore throwing the Corporal up into the helicopter.

"Johnny!" he called across to Kieran. "Come on we'll run for it."

The other peeling an empty magazine from his rifle to replace it with a full one, shouted back, "No you go I'll hold them," while frantically waving one arm back handed at Urwin to make his dash.

Dave raising from a crouch, sprinted for the helicopter. Because of low obstructions around the clearing, the pilot was having to hover four feet off the deck. Nevertheless, Urwin entered the aircraft in a single leap to pivot about, concerned for the safety of his mate.

Kieran was still standing at the edge of the jungle, firing aimed shots first in one direction then another. As his ammunition ran out, he threw the rifle down, turning to race for the centre of the clearing. Hatless, a black two week growth of hair on his face, a sweat rag tied loosely around his neck, his muddy jungle green shirt and trousers dark with sweat, Paddy Kieran scrambled for his life.

Pulling himself over one fallen tree trunk, he hurdled another driving himself through the low vegetation to the safety of the helicopter. Diving for the door as it began to lift off, he was first held by three pairs of hands, then dragged up onto the aluminium flooring. Collapsed in a tangle of bodies, Urwin heard Kieran's voice next to his ear, shouting breathlessly over the noise of the engine.

"Davy tat was hairy."

Eight Platoon ran, bent forward, loading themselves into the three Wessex helicopters as they skimmed in one after another to hover, allowing the Paratroopers to heave heavily-loaded bodies through the sliding doors. All around the Company helipad was noise swirling dust, and men frantically gesturing, this was a rushed operation and looked it.

An hour earlier 7 Platoon had ambushed a party of Indos two miles inside the border, and now the Battalion Commander was sending in

cut-off parties to seal all escape routes, leading back across the border. Within minutes the big Wessexes were hovering at tree-top level, over a high spur of ground which sloped down from the border.

With his Bren gun slung, for the GPMGs were found to be too cumbersome to manhandle around the jungle, Jonesy Jones grabbed for the thirty metre rope, that was to be his means of reaching the deck. Pushing himself outwards he began his descent hand over hand, controlling his speed by locking the rope between his feet.

With the section's main fire power going in first, Sam Kyle took the rope to follow. Reaching the ground he unslung his rifle intending to go to cover, but on looking around momentarily froze.

Jones was slumped against a tree, cupping two bloody hands in a painful grimace, having lost his grip, sliding the last thirty feet, badly burning them on the rope. But this wasn't Sam's real concern, all around amongst the trees in every direction were low rattan shelters, cooking fires and articles of military clothing and kit.

Kyle didn't have to look twice to realize the platoon was unwittingly being dropped into an enemy basher area of at least Company size. Snatching up Jones' machine gun, he threw himself behind a tree, expecting at any moment to be fired on from a dozen different directions. As more of his men arrived Sam's first fears vanished, not so much because of the increase of reinforcements, but now aware the Indos must have done a bunk.

As each Wessex unloaded their troops onto the spur, 8 Platoon pushed out in an ever enlarging circle. Captain Roe having been given the job of Platoon Commander by the OC, taking over from Lieutenant Austen who was in hospital with an acute skin disease, approached the rear of Bob MacIntyre's section looking to site his Platoon HQ. This was interrupted, as if an electric shock had flashed through the position. One of MacIntyre's men began to point to his front, alternating this with the thumbs down signal, another man without warning took aim and fired.

"Bobby! Bobby! Two of them," shouted another.

The Lance Corporal reacted instinctively, "Three Section prepare to pepper pot," he commanded scrambling to his feet.

Sam Kyle on hearing the shots, gathered his section in, then with Burrows the radio operator behind him, set off in a single-file to lend support. With eyes only for the enemy, Burrows took little notice of the soldier in floppy jungle hat and OG uniform, that pushed past first Sam Kyle, then shouldered him into the undergrowth, in what seemed an urgent need to get to the rear.

The action lasted only a few minutes, Bob MacIntyre once seeing the enemy had made their escape, wisely halting his section before they lost contact with each other in the leafy green labyrinth. Later walking his section back to their original position Sam was stopped by the signaller with a question.

Who was that bastard who almost trampled us down back there Sam?"

"Didn't you see him then?" replied the Corporal drily.

"Well it looked like Roe," answered Burrows, unsure.

"Yeah that's right," confirmed Kyle moving off to deal with more important things.

The base camp 'D' Company operated out of was three hundred miles south of the 5th Battalion's area. Here, beside a wide fast flowing river, on the outskirts of a large native village they had taken up accommodation. Unlike the rest of the battalion who went into Company defensive positions, they lived in billets. That is they slept and rested in them.

For the extent of the six month tour, only four days out of every six weeks did they find themselves under these roofs, the rest was spent on patrol in the jungle.

Dave Urwin relaxed in the shade of a small timber lean-to, sitting with his back against one of the corner poles. Here he waited along with two other patrols for one of the Naval Wessex helicopters which supported 'D' Company, to lift them out to the border. The crew of the helicopter had found some problem with their craft on the journey from the coast, and were busy completing running repairs while the dozen soldiers waited.

Urwin wasn't as comfortable about this patrol as he had been with others in the past, it had nothing to do with their recent narrow escape, that he accepted as part of the game. However, because of that incident he now found himself promoted to Lance Corporal, taking over as patrol commander. This did give him some apprehension, but the real nagging worry he found hard to fight off had been initiated by his wife's letter, which he now held in his hand, having read it over and over for the last three days.

Now once again he read Mary's key line.

Dave, I'm pregnant. You're going to be a father.

Looking up he watched as the Wessex started her engines in

preparation for a trial run, then taking off from the broad grassy bank adjoining the river that was ‘D’ Company’s landing zone. As the aircraft lifted straight upwards, the pilot, not wishing to be too ambitious close to the ground until the fault had been proven to be rectified, didn’t hear the other incoming Wessex as it approached at tree-top level to land. Even those watching barely had the chance to cry useless warnings before the blades of the lower aircraft, chewed into the belly of the other.

The climbing Wessex was the first down, tail first it struck the river. The second dropping sideways in a shallow dive to hit the water, her rotor blades still turning. The splash was large but quickly subsided as the helicopter carried by the current began to tumble, then finally sink below the muddy surface.

Dave Urwin climbed to his feet, but like everyone else did nothing. Some in shock, others knowing there was nothing to be done, everyone that is except 'Taff' Lewis. At a dead run he charged for the river bank, releasing the belt order from around his waist as he ran. At the shore he dived into a native dug-out canoe, forcing it to skim out towards the first helicopter that was just settling below the water. Without hesitation the burly Sergeant went in after it.

Feeling not seeing, because of the murky water, the pilots’ compartment door, he reached in gripping a shoulder strap between his fingers, then with strength normally reserved for pulling others into the muddy grass of rugby pitches, dragged the young pilot out and up to the surface. For everyone else it was hopeless, of the three patrols riding in the incoming Wessex, and the remainder of the two crews nothing was found. Any flesh freeing itself from the wreckage was soon devoured by the river crocodiles.

A week later, now well across the Indonesian border, ‘Taff’ Lewis halted his patrol for a ten minute rest. Billy Kennedy acting as the lead scout and wishing to investigate the top of a nearby slope indicated his request back to the Sergeant. Receiving permission with three quick hand signals, he made his way to the crest. Hunched forward because of the weight of his Bergen, the rifle held low across his body, he peered over a hedge of bracken, methodically scanning the far ground.

Having reached the extreme left of his sweep, and then retracing the arc he suddenly found himself face to face with something that hadn’t been there first time past. Before turning, as if in slow motion to pick his way gingerly back down the slope, Billy found he had time to study the features of a fully hooded King Cobra, three feet from his nose. The dark two tone colour of the eyes, the pigmentation and

texture of the scales, the breadth of the hood and thin U-shaped line of the mouth above the cream coloured under throat. All these Kennedy observed and stored as an unforgetable picture, photographed on his mind forever. In fact from first glimpse to his bounding about turn took 0.3 of a second.

The first indication the resting patrol had of the young cockney's plight was an unending scream, then watched as Billy hysterically threw his rifle in one direction his Bergen another while he clawed and tumbled down towards them. Having sprung to their feet, they allowed him to pass through before following hot footed, with backward glances each now also on the verge of panic themselves. It took two miles and the rest of the day for Kennedy to recover, but still unable to find the courage to retrieve his rifle and kit until the next morning.

A shaft of sunlight finding a hole in the high canopy of branches above Bob MacIntyre's head, appeared as a spot light to shine its egg-shaped beam on the dead and mouldy leaves at his feet. This like a signal was telling him that the last of the frequent rain showers were over, and he should now be moving his patrol on, but the Lance Corporal didn't. He and his men were tired for they were into the last month of their six month tour.

The job his section had been sent on was not a vital one, that of a recce sweep from the Company position towards the border, then back again. This had been done by them a dozen times before, and although never carried out in an off-handed manner, was routine. Besides, if they arrived back early. Allander would only find them a job filling sandbags or digging another DTL.

It wasn't just tiredness that caused him to remain stationary — Bob was pissed off. Lately the title of a book he once read kept re-occurring to him, *The Jungle is Neutral,* 'what a load of bollocks that is' he thought, 'the moment you set foot in the place it's trying to knobble ya. The ants, the mosquitoes, and most other insects all have a go. The vegetation, vines and plants, all reach out to tear clothes, scratch skin and generally make life uncomfortable. Even the damp humid climate is continually at work, combining with the grime and sweat, to lay you low with body rashes and skin diseases.' MacIntyre pondered all these things, as he watched with loathing the one creature of the jungle he hated above all others.

Crawling towards his boot across damp leaves was a Vampires' Worm, two inches long and jet black. Repeatedly stopping to raise its ugly sucker mouthed head was a leech, coming for Bob not through

any chance encounter for they were much more sophisticated and cunning than that. With a built-in blood sensor they waited in ambush, dropping on passing warm blooded animals from branches and leaves, or like the one after MacIntyre tracking their prey across the jungle floor.

Because of these blood suckers, the Army had devised a set drill. Every evening the men pairing up would strip naked so each could explore the other's body. It was not uncommon for someone to find dozens of these now bloated to four times their size clinging to any part of the body.

This a lad from 9 Platoon discovered one evening when a bull leech was found swollen to the size of a small cucumber clamped to the head of his penis. The means of removing had to be delicate, for to pull them off would leave bits of the sucker in the flesh causing infection. The only satisfactory option was to burn them with a lighted cigarette end, or apply a drop of anti-mosquito lotion. In this way they would contract, then release their hold and finally fall away.

Standing up to crush the obnoxious black crawling thing into the ground with the butt of his rifle, Bob passed the silent signal on to his lead scout to resume moving.

Two hours later with 3 Section turning for home on the final leg of their sweep, disaster struck. The last man stepping over a thick log slipped, losing his balance to fall heavily against a young tree. This dislodged a grey papery-materialled hornets' nest the size of a large water melon, which crashed to the ground. The young soldier seeing what he had done, broke free of his Bergen to run off shouting a warning to the others, but it was too late.

The jungle hornet is a particularly nasty piece of business, when aroused it attacks with the sting of a hypodermic needle. For the next agonizing fear-filled minutes they pursued and assaulted the members of 3 Section with vendetta persistence.

Discarding packs, belts and in some cases weapons, the men charged blindly through the jungle, in a vain effort to defeat the killer bees in the only way possible, out-running them. Trapped, arms flailing, slapping, beating, or cowering on the ground trying to somehow ward off the jabs of pain, they lost.

When the last hornet had struggled out from under the temporarily imprisoning olive green clothing they left behind a battle field. Bob MacIntyre, pushing himself above his suffering, climbed to his feet to stagger about the area in search of his Bergen. Having found it he painfully loosened the straps with bitten hands to pull out the medical

pack, from this, he opened a bottle of yellow pills and quickly swallowed two. These were Piriton tablets which was all he had to ward off the poisonous effect of the hornets' stings.

He then searched for and found with some difficulty, because now one of his eyes was closing, the A41 radio set that the signaller had discarded into a fern bush. Once he had established communications with the Company base, his request to them was a simple one — that of help.

With this done he now saw as best he could to his men. Seeking them out with calls and half-blind stumbling explorations, he first gave them the Piriton, in some cases forcing them to take it, then one way or another coaxed and guided them all back to a central area.

As a fighting force his section was neutralized. The men, collapsed, huddled in a hellish mind tortured fug betraying their misery with spasmodic whines and moans, suffered and prayed for relief. The tail-end soldier was in the worst state, he being the closest and taking the brunt of the attack was completely unconscious.

Aid, when it came was by rope through the trees, the first man down being CSM Allander. What he found was heart rending. Nine swollen-faced men, unconscious or semi-unconscious, utterly incapable of personal assistance. The rescuers extracted MacIntyre's men by having to clear an emergency helicopter landing pad, of several trees and a lot of low shubbery. This to be followed by a week in the Battalion Medical Aid Post back at Rear Echelon before they were again passed fit.

"Look old son," began Ron Allander in a firm but understanding tone, "I know this is your third guard in five days, but there is no chance of you getting off it."

"Yes Sir but …" began the Company Cook convinced he was over worked and put upon. But interrupted by his CSM before he could extend his case.

"I know what you're going to say Dean, we all put in a hard day's work around here and I appreciate you have longer hours than most. But it's a case of manpower. We are having a short supply of it at the moment. All I can promise is that after tonight you won't get another guard for a week. Now fall out."

The Cook seeing his application for reprieve from the night's guard detail had been refused, turned smartly about to march out of Allander's bunker-cum-office-cum-bedroom.

The Sergeant Major rising from the make-shift bamboo desk, placed his wide green jungle hat on his head, then feeling to ensure the tartan battalion patch on the side was square over the correct ear, he stepped out into the warm afternoon sunshine to make his fears known to the OC.

“Sir we have become far too thin on the ground,” he began. “Yesterday was bad enough, but after losing that section from 8 Platoon this morning it’s now become ludicrous.”

“Yes Sergeant Major,” agreed ‘Knocker’ punching fist into palm, “but there’s not much I could do, Charlie Oscar,” referring to the Commanding Officer by his phonetic alphabet nickname.

“Needed them to reinforce 9 Platoon’s op in the south. I don’t think we should worry too much though, 7 Platoon are due back from patrol tomorrow afternoon, and Corporal MacIntyre’s men should be back with us the day after.”

“It’s not tomorrow I’m worried about Sir,” pressed Allander. “We only have eighteen men on the position. Seven of the Mortar Section, Corporal Kyle’s six men, Dean the cook and us,” he summed up waving his arm at the signaller sitting by the radio.

“Well unless you can produce some bodies out of thin air Sergeant Major, we are just going to have to get along with what we have,” was the OC’s sympathetic but exasperated reply.

“I know Sir,” agreed Allander finally, “but I thought it best to make the point.”

The first mortar bomb exploded on the helicopter pad shortly after 8.00 pm. The Company’s thinned ranks automatically stood-to, more out of curiosity than concern, for two mortar bombs had been dropped on the position a fortnight earlier. This mood soon changed when three more arrived in the space of a minute, destroying the cook’s tent and the water bowser.

The first casualty that night was a mortar man. Big Robbie Elliot who had been on sentry when the first bomb landed, rushed back to the section’s sleeping bunker, shouting for everyone to stand-to. With no light to see by the other five stumbled out half-dressed carrying web equipment and rifles. Counting only four men Elliot hollered impatiently for the last man to hurry. From inside he heard Fred Denison’s voice.

“It’s me fucking boots — can’t find them.”

Moments later Elliot was blown back down the communication

trench, by a blast from within the bunker. Staggering, dazed, to his feet, he stumbled back to the doorway. Either prepared to take the chance, or too stunned to realize what he was doing, he felt for the sentry's torch on his belt, shining its beam in the bunker doorway.

The mortar bomb had penetrated the log roofing before exploding, totally demolishing the interior. As the bomb's smoke drifted up and out the door, filling the mortar man's nostrils with a familiar acid smell, his torch light picked out a bloody severed arm lying just inside the muddy door sill. Elliot turned to join his mortar crew, there was nothing to be done here.

With the arrival of the first explosion Ron Allander, having remained fully dressed despite the sweat and discomfort, shot off his bunk scooping up his rifle and webbing before running for the Command Post. There he found the OC directing his Signaller in sending a situation report to Battalion HQ.

"It looks like the bastards are out to disturb our sleep as per the other night Sergeant Major," suggested 'Knocker' punching his palm.

"Not too sure Sir,- began Allander, "that's six bombs then pausing as another explosion sounded below the ridge. "Seven bombs — I think we're in for more this time."

"Yes well perhaps," pondered the OC before informing his CSM, "I've tried to raise Kyle on the blower, but the line seems to be dead. It would be a good idea to contact him, maybe his sentries have seen something."

"You're right," agreed Allander. "I'll nip down to the guard bunker and see what info he has," hastily volunteered the Sergeant Major, humouring his Commander's prompting. For he was quite aware even if 'Knocker' wasn't, that a seventy-five metre trip down a dark trench system in the blackness of a mortar-filled night, would not be a stroll.

His false eagerness to go was not inspired by the suggestion, but because Ron had learned to read his OC's character. Griffin, he could see was desperately lost, his mind fogged by lack of information and the uncertainty of what was really happening. Faced with this present event there was no hope of him formulating a plan of action that would deal with any coming escalations.

"Good! Good Sergeant Major," sanctioned Griffin, applauding Allander through the doors' double-blanketed masking curtains, shielding the Command Posts' lantern light, with fist into palm punches.

Sheltering just outside in the cover of the bunker's wall, against

possible mortar blast he waited, allowing his eyes to become accustomed to the dark. His keenness to make this trip was not wholly that of relieving his OC's anxiety. He knew that if there was any news to be had Corporal Kyle's sentries would have gained it, besides they would no doubt appreciate his reassuring appearance.

Blinking several times to check his vision, the Warrant Officer took a firm hold of his rifle, grasping the stock in one hand, the pistol grip just behind the trigger guard with the other. Before he could take his first intended step, he froze on hearing a single SLR shot. When this was followed by two others of an unfamiliar sound he turned, ducking back into the Command Post.

"There's shots from the south of the position Sir," he hurriedly informed the OC, discarding his rifle in favour of the Company's spare GPMG resting against the bunker wall just inside the door. Then slinging two belts of ammunition around his neck, and picking up another box of two hundred rounds he disappeared back through the blankets.

At the southern end of the trench he halted, unsure whether to remain on the high ground, or continue down into the darkness below. Accepting the fact that he was one man alone, Allander mounted the machine gun on the sandbagged parapet facing south west, then loading the weapon took control of it sweeping to both left and right, ensuring he could cover a wide arc.

Since the initial brief volley there had been no other shots, however, mortar bombs spaced by long intervals, still continued to explode to the north of the position. Resting the butt from his shoulder the Sergeant Major's pale blue eyes strained downward into the darkness concealing the ground beyond the descending slope.

Uncertainty, doubt and the inability to respond correctly to the ever increasing confusion caused by sounds and the night's darkness was general throughout 'C' Company's defensive position. Only one man knew they were being attacked in force, and he was at that moment, floundering around the south eastern trenches, lost. This was Dean the cook, who had been on sentry at the south west sangar. Cowering under the open-sided, earth-roofed shelter, as each new bomb landed, he nevertheless kept watch through the wire to the jungle whose features showed as little more than a black wall.

It was difficult to see any great distance, for dark rain clouds had been hanging in the sky for some hours causing the night to become even darker. Unexpectedly a small flash of moonlight shouldered its way around a cloudy bank, to be instantly blotted out by another

passing below the first. It lasted less than a second, but that was enough. Stunned Dean raised his rifle, dropping the safety catch with his thumb.

“Drum,” he called, challenging without thinking with the first half of the pass word.

“Drum,” he called again, this time knowing in his heart of hearts any reply would not be the right one.

Resting his forearm on the top sandbag to take a quick aim, he fired one shot in the direction of the twenty or so figures he had seen clearing an entrance for themselves in the wire. When two rounds were returned piercing the night air to one side of his shelter, the cook fled up the trench. If he had had the nerve to stay and use the field telephone next to his elbow, the night may have had a slightly different conclusion.

“Are you sure you can’t see anything Phil? He’s still not answering the poxy phone.” Phil Peters had already told Sam Kyle that from his sentry post in the south east corner of the position, he couldn’t make out anything happening at Dean’s post to the west.

“Yeah, yeah, Sam for fuck sake it’s blacker than a golly’s ass out here,” rasped the young soldier into his telephone in a low fugitive whisper.

“OK, OK,” relented the Corporal, “but keep your eyes open there’s something on over there, and Phil if things start happening around you, bug out and rejoin us here at the bunker.”

“No bloody fear, it’s getting scary as hell out here,” came back Peter’s honest reply.

Placing the field telephone back on its cradle, Kyle looked up, to pass a frustrated comment to the only other occupant of the now darkened guard bunker, “Something’s going on,” then standing up from his rickety bamboo desk, stood by the doorway staring into the night for a moment, before continuing, “I’d like to have a look-see down Dean’s way.”

“OK Sam, but don’t bother asking for company,” replied Jones turning from his vigil hunched over the bunker’s machine gun, covering out a fire slit towards the helicopter pad and the perimeter wire gateway beyond. The remark half intended in jest, washed over the Corporal’s head, he was deep in serious ponder, his mind buzzing with questions and unsanctioned plans.

Having no communication with the Command Post, the Corporal was finding the absence of direct orders frustrating. He had already

positioned those of his sentries not on guard, around the bunker but other than that, without permission he was helpless. His half-hearted suggestion of investigating the rifle fire was nothing more, for he knew only too well the danger of moving about unsupported in the darkness.

Returning to his chair, now resolved to the fact that any action, other than what he had already done would have to be authorised, he again picked up the phone to ring once more the CP and Dean's southern post. As he began to crank the bell system, his hand suddenly locked halfway around its turning, for from the opposite end of the position a machine gun began to fire in continuous short rapid bursts, followed by rifle shots and grenades exploding.

"'Jonesy' get the others we're moving up to the CP," shouted Kyle, now ringing the guard posts to call his sentries in. "And make sure that gun comes with us."

At first the blond Sergeant Major hesitated, unsure as to who they were, friend or foe. But whipping the butt into his shoulder he opened fire, jabbing short bursts from one shadowy group to another. They had to be Indos, the Company didn't have that many men on this side of the position. Unnecessary confirmation of this was the return of rifle fire and grenades.

Allander fought, engaging targets as they appeared, moving the gun a metre here, a metre there, giving back bullet for bullet. He had the advantage of higher ground, but they had numbers. Most of their fire however, was passing harmlessly over his head, caused mainly by the common tendency to shoot high at night. The grenades were his worst worry, not of the shrapnel, but from the flash that momentarily blinded him.

For what seemed a life time, but was actually fifteen minutes, the CSM loaded, fired and killed. Holding the attack single-handedly.

All this time the gun was in constant use, the barrel becoming hotter and hotter, only having short reprieves to cool, when a stoppage had to be cleared or the gun reloaded. During one lull for this, as Allander deftly lifted the top cover to sweep the feed tray clear with his hand, he anxiously glanced over his shoulder, hoping to see some sign of help, but help for him would not be coming, Corporal Kyle had seen to that.

On arriving at the CP with those of the guard he had been able to collect, Sam found himself being nervously challenged by 'Knocker' and Andy Dawson, who as the mortar fire controller normally slept nearby.

“Well done Corporal Kyle, now bring your men, the Sergeant Major’s in a spot of bother,” ordered the OC beginning to lead off towards the sound of the firing.

“Wait Sir, wait,” called Kyle in a loud whisper, hurrying to catch his Company Commander by the arm, “We can’t go down there Sir, there’s a fire fight going on.”

The Major misunderstanding Sam’s meaning, pulled his arm away, angrily informing the Corporal that Allander was on his own and needed help.

“Yes Sir I understand,” pleased the Corporal, “but we can’t go down there it’s too dark, we’ll end up shooting each other.”

The Major glared back at Kyle, so motivated by surges of adrenalin and the wish to go to the aid of a man he had grown to respect, that he momentarily suspected the Corporal of cowardice.

“Corporal Kyle’s right Sir,” came the calm logical voice of Andy Dawson stepping towards his OC. “To get involved down there now would be dangerous. If the Sergeant Major can’t handle that alone he’ll pull back to us.”

‘Knocker’ confronted by sound reason, and slowly seeing the sense of this argument reluctantly relented, allowing Sam instead to position his men around the CP bunker.

Frustrated by Allander’s machine gun fire, the Indonesian assault troops began filtering to their left, hoping to out-flank the ridge by sweeping up the level ground on its western side. This should have given them a free run, but here they came up against the men in the two mortar pits.

They were in just as much of a fog as everyone else in the Company location, but whatever was going to happen to them, they were ready for it.

Two men, Robbie Elliot and John Charlton, whose ancestors as border reivers in an earlier conflict, had been mortal enemies, now waited silently shoulder to shoulder, crouched in their mortar pit waiting to kill or be killed, by whatever may be coming at them out of the night. Neither aware that except for time of birth, they could have been facing each other with lance or musket somewhere on the bleak windswept border hill country of England and Scotland, determined to extract part payment of a long continuing feud by one killing the other. Now separated by ten thousand miles and four hundred years, the Scot and Englishman, both with names once feared for their pillaging, robbery and burning against each, waited prepared to fight

and if need be die together.

The first to see the enemy was the other mortar team, this resulted in a sharp exchange of rifle fire. Elliot watched to his front, but could see nothing, then with a tap from John Charlton both ducked as movement was seen several metres away coming towards them. Lowering themselves below the lip of the pit, both men waited, Charlton ready with his bayoneted rifle, Elliot gripping the handle of his short-bladed chopping jungle knife, this being his only weapon, having lost his rifle in the trench, when he was blown backwards by the mortar bomb that killed Denison.

The first Indonesian fell into the pit, the night so dark, it was impossible to make out the ground. Here he was grabbed by the big Scotsman, who pinned him to the bottom of the mortar pit with a knee, as he fought to hold his head still in the soupy clay. As his left hand locked around the face, one finger pushed deep into an eye, the mouth below his palm began to scream. This was silenced with two fierce chops of the gollock blade, as it crushed deep bloody grooves in the oriental's skull.

Turning, he rose to meet a figure, rifle in hand, rushing forward in answer to the first's scream. Before Elliot could reach for him, Charlton lunged upwards driving his bayonet into the man's stomach. With a sagging moan and aided by his own momentum, Charlton pitch-forked him over their heads, to land in the wet mud the other side of the pit, where he lay for the remainder of the night dying.

The enemy again finding themselves up against opposition, pulled back to engage the darkness to their front with rifle fire and hopefully discover another way around.

With the first sound of shooting from the area of the mortars, Andy Dawson stepped over the trench parapet.

Caught off guard, Sam reached forward grabbing the back yoke strap of his webbing.

"Where the fuck you going?" he asked knowing full well, but determined not to let him do it.

"I've got to go Sam, that's my lads down there," was Dawson's quiet reply, looking back over his shoulder into the other's eyes.

Kyle released the strap without a word, to watch as his friend faded down the slope and into the dark. The mortar bomb struck the ground beside Dawson's feet, just as he arrived at the foot of the ridge, its upward mushrooming blast threw him sideways to the ground, where he lay bleeding and unconscious, his jaw, cheek bone and part of his

skull on the right hand side of his face carved away by a large sliver of metal.

Throughout the night more probing by the Indonesian troops was made, but each time they were either stopped by Ron Allander's machine gun or the mortars. Those of the enemy that did manage to by-pass any opposition, found themselves alone and out of touch, not knowing what to do. Some crossed over the ridge, others stumbled around its base totally disorientated, all adding nothing to the battle and in the end having to slip back through the wire, to the cover of jungle before first light.

Major Griffin peered down the sandbagged communication trench, trying hard to trace its course southwards.

"We'll give it another five minutes Corporal Kyle and then you're off."

"Right Sir," replied the Corporal beside him, not taking his eyes off the slowly retreating gloom to his front, both men shivering in short spasmodic chills, from the dampness of the recent rain squall, one of three that had passed over that night.

Sam looked at his watch, it should have been first light by now, but because of the sheets of rain and the low overhanging black clouds, the long awaited first signs of dawn were being postponed.

The OC having had the time to think about it realized that should the CP be overrun, the position would be lost. With this his main concern, he had consolidated the defence of Kyle's men, then radioing battalion that he would be requiring a lot of aid in the morning, anxiously waited out the remainder of the night. Now his heart again getting the better of him, he had decided on one act of irresponsibility, he was sending Sam Kyle with two of his men to find his Sergeant Major.

With a tap on his shoulder and a whispered, "Right, away you go," from the OC, the Corporal and his men set off. Moving in bounds down the trench, one always covering the other. Sam didn't need any more reminders of alertness, but as he picked up a single live round of American ammunition from the mud, his stomach began to tighten that little bit more.

"Careful lads," he warned, "They're in the trenches."

Some minutes later they found their CSM in a bleary-eyed state of jumpiness, hunched over his machine gun. The look he gave them should have been one of angry frustration at being left out on a limb, instead it was a shallow smile of relief.

“You alright Sir?” asked Kyle coming up beside him.

“Yeah Sam still in one piece I think,” replied Allander, allowing himself the sin of calling the Corporal by his first name. This reply was suddenly disputed by Kyle taking a closer look.

“Jesus wept.” Then pulling a field dressing from his shirt pocket, began to apply it to the CSM’s neck wound. The blood had been oozing most of the night, covering his entire left side with dark reddish smears. As the Corporal began securing the bandage with its first wrapping one of his men standing just behind shouted a warning.

“SAM!"

In that same instant levelling and firing his rifle. Kyle ducking at the shout, and blast of the shot, turned to look in the direction his man had fired. A figure twenty metres away, his arms spread wide was falling backwards down the slope. At the same moment, the corner of his eye caught a small green object as it dropped into the trench. Diving forward he snatched the grenade out of the mud, throwing it back down the hill, there to explode over the heads of the first wave of enemy, as they charged once again, hoping to take the ridge crest with a dawn attack.

Throwing themselves against the trench wall, the three rifle men began aiming and firing, at the men climbing the slope of the ridge.

With the light steadily increasing the enemy was no longer a dark blur in the night. Now the pale brown uniform, their grey-green equipment, and the small black American Armilite rifles, all stood out to be clearly seen. Even their faces with expressions of hate, fear, pain and death, as they rose and fell beyond the defenders’ rifle sights, were plainly seen.

An uphill assault, on a defended position must be supported with suppressive fire, this keeping the defenders’ heads down, until the attacker can get amongst them. The Indonesian Infantry, struggling up the muddy southern incline of ‘C’ Company’s ridge, were paying dearly for the absence of this vital support.

Sam, snapping shots at heads as they appeared before him, was also frantically directing his two men, trying to cover arcs and gaps that Allander’s Gimpy couldn’t. When the machine gun fell silent through a stoppage in the breach, he pulled a grenade from his front webbing strap to hurl it towards the ground the GPMG was no longer covering. This had to be followed by a second, before the gun again pounded its high velocity fire down the hill.

The attack did not end as quickly as it started, its impetus

diminished slowly, until only the odd shot was pinging over their heads, or kicking up splats of mud below the trench lip.

Afraid to move unless caught by another attack, they stayed hastily filling magazines, shifting sandbags, pushing bits of timber into spaces. Doing anything that might, no matter in what small way prepare them for the next attack.

Ron Allander was the first, whose eyes looking beyond the ground to his front, penetrated the still shadowy darkness that was being held longer below the ridge by the jungle's near presence.

"Corporal Kyle," he called, "down by the wire." Sam cautiously lifted his head above the lip of the trench. Through the remaining gloom and early morning mist, he began to make out movement passing out the perimeter barrier.

"You're right Sir, you're right, they're scampering, they've had enough," answered Sam in a flat matter-of-fact tone, surprised that instead of rejoicing all he felt was an inward relief.

Allander pulled the butt of his weapon back into his shoulder, then locking his wrists tight together again took aim. With the gun firing short bursts, Sam nodded down the hill towards the wire giving his last fire order to the two other riflemen.

"Right get to work pick off everyone you can."

The enemy rear guard at the wire entrance returned their fire. As one fell or died. he was dragged or carried through the gap to the shelter of the jungle beyond. The last man to leave had remained behind to see each of the rear guard safely out, then twisting and dodging to elude the fire coming down from the ridge, he too vanished into the inky blackness of the trees.

The first relief troops in were the Drums Platoon, spilling out of the first helicopter to take up fire positions. The choppers sped in to hover for only as long as it took the men to bail out, then arced up and away in a powered climb.

The next in was Bob MacIntyre's section, some of whom climbed out of sick beds in the middle of the night, to demand a seat aboard one of the helicopters. When the force was large enough Major Griffin set them to sweeping through the location, with the intention of clearing any pockets of the enemy left behind.

The only Indos found were the bodies of the two that Elliot and Charlton killed, the rest had been carried away, even those from the south slope of the ridge, where many had died.

‘C’ Company was to find that the enemy attack had been well-prepared and carried out by the best of Sukarnos troops, Javanese Paratroopers.

The two mortar bombs fired a fortnight earlier were solely to bed the mortar’s base plate in, which was then camouflaged and left, ready for use in the later attack.

The assault failed mainly because of the darkness of the night, where lack of communication, co-ordination and the general confusion through being disorientated, toppled the attackers off their stride.

The final straw that forced them to retreat were the high casualties they found themselves suffering by the defenders who, although lacking numbers, stood their ground and fought back.

The Commanding Officer had been in his own CP all night preparing a counter stroke, monitoring the battle through his radio link with ‘C’ Company. When Major Griffin reported the enemy withdrawing, he dispatched more helicopters filled with hot pursuit troops to lay ambushes on the routes leading over the border, which resulted in other bloody contacts before the day was over.

This attack on ‘C’ Company was to have been the enemy’s show piece battle, capturing one of the border strong points. Its failure had cost them dearly, but it had also cost 5 Para too.

Denison’s body, initially wrapped in a poncho, was lifted out to a coffin at the battalion base area, then flown on for burial in Singapore.

Andy Dawson found still alive, but in a frightful state, was also flown to Singapore where he was placed in a military hospital. Robbie Elliot having picked up a bullet wound in the cheek during the night, accompanied him to remain at the Corporal’s bedside for three days until he, on never recovering consciousness, finally died.

Dean, the cook after first stumbling around in the dark, spent the night with Peters at his cut-off sentry post, whereas he said next morning, “We never saw anyone, no one saw us and that was just the way we wanted it.”

That night, Sam like the other surviving defenders of the recent battle, tried to get some much-earned sleep, but it was impossible. Every sound no matter how small or ordinary, had him jack knifing off his cot, his nerves taut as bow strings.

This proved to be the battalion’s last action, three weeks later they sailed on a crowded little steamer back to Singapore and Blighty. But

it was not the last for ‘D’ Company. The patrol soldiers had been working flat out at no time relaxing their presence in the hilly border country. Their main role was intelligence gathering; watching tracks, river routes, spying out villages and investigating reports of enemy activity.

This investigation of a supposedly enemy build-up was what Dave Urwin had now been set to do. A week earlier he and his new command had begun working an area of the border, in which they were completing its mapping. This was becoming more and more of an importance, for until this conflict blew up the countryside had not been worth the bother.

Now the unmapped great spaces of blankness were becoming strategic with HQ Staff desperate to know where the hills, valleys, rivers, tracks and villages were.

Urwin was agreeable to this for his outlook on life was beginning to change. With the news that Mary was to have a baby, he had now become aware of family responsibilities, and with that a hard assessment of his cavalier existence. Since joining the Army he hadn’t looked beyond the next day, only living for the life, his mates and any adventures they got up to.

Now he was thinking more and more of his coming family, his ability to provide for them, and was a future in the Army the right thing. However, at the moment all these worries were pushed to the back of his mind, for he and his men had suddenly found themselves being hurried to another district, to support ‘Taff' Lewis and his men.

Having been told by radio to RV with 6 Patrol four days earlier, they had force marched the twenty-five miles to link up.

Now he and his patrol were waiting in the humid midday heat for them to return from a recce, for they, deep across the border were providing a back-up cover party, while the members of 6 Patrol spied out a large Kampong half a mile further on. Never one to take his work lightly, and knowing 'Taff' would carry out the task meticulously, Urwin had settled his men into a loose defensive circle to await the others’ return, which hopefully would be just before dusk.

This assumption was suddenly kicked into touch, as shots were heard from the location of the village, which gradually built to include machine gun fire and grenade explosions.

The track Urwin had set his men to guard was intended to be the escape route out of the village. Now, realizing that their getaway, may hinge on whether or not they carried out a carefully prepared fighting withdrawal, he ordered his men to their feet.

Sending Kieran and 'Tam' McSweeny up the trail with 6 Patrol's Bergens, he and Pridmore cautiously worked their way down it.

At a suitable bend he had the other man position a claymore mine, then alone continued on placing out one of his own. Dave opened the legs of the olive green claymore, an anti-personnel mine, eight inches by twelve by one thick, to brace it at the base of a tree. Then extending the similarly coloured electrical detonation cord to the protection of another tree, he settled himself into cover to await the others' return.

This he knew they would do, for despite the increase in the volume of fire coming from the village, his confidence in the Welsh Sergeant was such that the thought of his mates not appearing up this track had not entered his head.

This assurance of others however, did little to slow his pulse beat or reduce the flow of sweat from his body. For although confident of their safety he also realized extraction from this battle could not be guaranteed.

As the small animal and insect life around him began one by one to silence their continual screech, subdued by the unaccustomed racket of modern combat, he tensed as a dark figure burst into view, running along the track towards him.

His grip on the mine's detonator relaxed, when within the same instant he recognized it to be Jim Sinclair, followed by Reg Berrill. On showing himself, the two men dropped breathless at his side.

Sinclair crouched on his knees facing back down the track, gasping between disjointed sentences, as he gave Urwin a rough situation report. "Bastards … caught us crossing a path … had us pinned in a monsoon ditch … fucking Army in there!"

"Yeah," broke in Reg, "must have been trooping the fucking colours — place chock a block."

"Where's the others?" interrupted Urwin more concerned with the present than the past.

"About a hundred metres back. They were covering us through," answered Sinclair wiping the perspiration from his forehead, below a green ragged sweat cloth he wore around his head in place of a hat.

"Well don't hang around here," warned Urwin, "I've got a claymore set up, so has Mick further up. I'll see the others back, you two push off."

Shortly a volley of shots was heard from just down the track,

followed a few moments later by Billy Kennedy and 'Taff' Lewis, running towards him. Again showing himself these two men also stopped. But the Sergeant anxious to keep on, pushed Billy up the pathway.

"You OK here?" asked the burly Sergeant, also panting and out of breath.

"Oh aye, no problems! I got a claymore down at that tree," nodding his head towards it, replying in a voice more confident than he felt.

"OK, we just gave them a surprise, so you got about two minutes," 'Taff' warned. Then turning to show a bloody right forearm, gave brief but positive directions before disappearing up the track.

"I don't want you being overly greedy now. Just take out the point men then get back."

The first enemy soldier came into view, crouched, moving in little hops from cover to cover. With a wave of his arm a second man passed beyond him, then a third. Urwin seeing they were all within the blast area squeezed the hand plunger that generated the electric current, igniting the mine.

With the explosion echoing through the jungle, four hundred ball-bearings sped out of a cloud of black smoke, stripping low trees and bushes, killing the three Indonesians with ghastly effect. Urwin dashed away from the scene of his ambush without bothering to observe the results.

Falling back to where Pridmore had laid his trap, he threw himself into a fold in the ground, where he could see 'Muffer' and cover the killing ground his claymore was faced into. Again, the first soldier to show himself did so cautiously, obviously nervous and not prepared to take chances. This was not surprising as he had just passed his three pulverized mates down the trail.

As the two paratroopers watched, he was joined by a second, this presumably his Commander, who waved him on with impatient flicks of his hand. Reluctantly, gripping his rifle tightly across his body the first Indonesian sprinted in a little zig-zagging dash to throw himself down, not into cover beside the trail, but onto its dark-earthed surface, the rifle pointing forward in the aim, his eyes searching the closely crowding vegetation either side of this narrow jungle lane.

Twenty metres further on Urwin and Pridmore watched from their concealment, as the Commander restlessly prompted the first to get on, with high raspy whispers. But he was having none of it, quite correctly unwilling to move until he had scanned every leaf and twig

for hidden dangers. The Commander was the first to crack bounding forward in little hops, probably to kick motion into his uncooperative subordinate.

Pridmore's cloud of deadly ball-bearings bludgeoned him off his feet, but passed harmlessly over the first. As the big Paratrooper bolted from his hide, a shot kicked up a small shower of dirt at his heels, then a second cut the air to one side of him, imbedding in a tree just off the track.

Dave caught off guard by Pridmore's sudden detonation wasn't able to take aim at the prone rifleman, until he had fired these two shots. But he never got a third.

The British 7.62 mm round smashed his collar bone tearing a channel through lungs, stomach and intestines. Three more bullets struck his body, before Dave shifted his aim upwards, to empty his rifle towards the bushes and shrub bordering the track, in the hope of deterring further pursuit. A short distance up the trail he found the rest waiting, Bergens on their backs. As he joined them Billy Kennedy lifted his for him to struggle into.

"OK boys," cautioned their Sergeant, a fresh bandage tied to his recently bleeding arm, "now we run!"

CHAPTER 16

The herded wolves, bold only to pursue;

The obscene ravens, clamorours o'er the dead.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Studying the Waterloo Station departure board, Lance Corporal Jim Sinclair waited for the timing of the Alton train, which would return him to Aldershot to be displayed. Dressed in a green rainproof jacket, with light trousers, and pale suede leather crepe soled desert boots, he hunched the canvas Bergen he carried further up his back to a more comfortable position, then again scanned the board above him.

With his uniform and equipment stowed in his pack, he was returning from a week's advanced explosives course with the Royal Engineers. The battalion had been back from Borneo six months, which after the usual spell of leave, was now concentrating on renewing their conventional warfare skills.

Just as he was about to look for one of the station staff, to ask the timings of the train that had not yet appeared, a voice caused him to start.

"Hello Jock."

The voice he didn't at first recognize, but he knew the attractive young woman the moment he turned.

"Hello Eva."

Eva Spellman, her amber hair set off by the matching yellow coat and skirt suit she wore, was just as lovely as Jim remembered. But the pleasant smile she was now giving him could not disguise a faint unhappiness within the eyes.

"I'm on my way to Southampton, and seeing you here I just had to say hello."

This greeting was cheerful enough, but Sinclair couldn't help feeling it was a little forced.

"That's kind, it's nice to see you again. How have you been?" responded the Scotsman.

They stood for a while longer exchanging pleasantries, then Sinclair suggested they have a cup of tea.

“You’re looking well Jim. The Army must be agreeing with you,” commented Eva, as she draped her coat over the stall seat in the station buffet.

“It hasn’t been too bad,” he replied offering a cigarette, “And you, you still in Germany?”

“No not any more, I’m separated now, have been for two years,” she confessed leaning across to accept Sinclair’s light.

“Sorry to hear,” was Jim’s only comment, then asked watching her closely, “It didn’t work out then?”

“No afraid not,” her voice now hinting sadness.

“It was alright at first, then, well he was away so much, the baby came, and well things got just so boring being alone in an Army quarter looking after a young baby.”

Jim watched as she drew the cigarette’s smoke into her lungs, to exhale it towards the ceiling, yes, he could picture Eva by herself in that house in Germany, being deprived of the one thing he knew she so needed and craved. As he watched her his mind drifted back to their days and nights in Cyprus. When they made love to each other, giving and taking pleasure from each other’s body, lost in a mist of passion as their lips and tongues traced the other’s naked flesh. Yes, he had no doubt what the loneliness had done to her, and the reason for the eventual separation.

“So you have a nipper then?” he asked, not wishing the conversation to get bogged down with her self-pity.

“Oh yes, a girl,” she replied now in a more cheerful tone. “She lives with her father’s mother here in London. That’s where I’ve been now. I get up to visit her at least once a week.”

They talked for another fifteen minutes, then looking at her watch Eva excused herself to catch the Southampton train. As she rose to slip into her coat, Jim also stood taking her hand in his.

“Bye Eva, I hope things turn out better for you in the future.”

For a moment she looked at him intending to say something.

“Jock…” she began, but got no further, beginning to cry she turned and ran from the buffet room, leaving Sinclair to stand alone watching her through the window, as she pushed her way across the crowded platform.

Walking from room to room Dave Urwin was cock-a-hoop. He had just

taken over a civilian flat in Farnham for himself as an Army hiring. In the living room, he collapsed on an easy chair to admire the pictures on the wall, the fireplace and the furniture. It had taken him three months to find this place, three months of writing letters, making phone calls, chasing down adverts, and tramping from estate agent to estate agent.

On returning from Borneo, he had been naïve enough to believe that once he applied for a quarter, one would be provided, but this was not the case. Although the Army was involved in a crash programme of building more modern quarters for the Aldershot Garrison, this would take some time yet.

When he did find out, what he would have to accept as a home for Mary and his recently born young son, he went cold. His accommodation, when one came free was to be Napier Square. That was when he decided to start hunting, for under no circumstances was he putting his family in that depressing block of red bricks.

It had been a frustrating time for him, having to return from Norfolk at the end of the battalion's leave before Mary had the baby, to begin many months of training. It soon became hectic, away on schemes, then back to hunt for a hiring in the evenings and again on weekends, having to decide whether to make the journey east to see his family, or stay and house hunt. Resting with his head against the back of the chair, Urwin knew he was going to have problems getting back and forth the five miles to camp each day — but better that than Napier Square.

Climbing from the chair he put his coat on, in order to make the short trip down to the call box, to warn his wife he was coming to collect her, and the baby this weekend. With this same call he would also be telling her he had made the decision, one she had left to him, that he intended staying in the Army and hopefully building a career of it.

"Well Sam congratulations I'm chuffed about this." RSM Tony Knight once his Platoon Sergeant, was shaking Sam Kyle's hand in welcome to the Sergeants' Mess. Standing on the wine-coloured carpet of the Mess Bar, wearing a borrowed shirt with Sergeant's stripes on, Sam thanked him in return.

"I suppose Beth's pleased for you?" continued Knight.

"Haven't had a chance to tell her Sir, I didn't find out myself until I walked into camp this morning," replied the new Sergeant.

"Well no matter she probably knows by now, the wives have a

better intelligence set up than the KGB."

Then promising to get his drink later he slapped him on the shoulder, moving across the room to join a group of Warrant Officers.

This new promotion had been a surprise to Kyle, for he was not the senior Corporal in the battalion. But he wasn't complaining, with a wife and three children to support the extra cash was welcomed.

Approaching the Mess Bar Sam ordered three drinks from the white-coated barman. These for 'Tuck' Friar, Ron Allander and himself. It was a traditional practice within the battalion's Sergeants' Mess, for the newly promoted to buy everyone a round. For Sam this lunch was to prove an expensive affair, Allander and Friar were only the first, there were sixty-odd members in 5 Para's Mess.

Just as he placed his hands around the handles of the three pint mugs to move off, a voice coming up from behind halted him, "So they've let you in have they Kyle," commented Sandy McLeod in his usual sarcastic manner as he leaned forward on the bar beside him.

"Well while you're here," he continued pushing his empty glass towards Sam.

"Mine's a whisky!"

Sam looked first at the glass then at it's red-necked owner before answering.

"Whisky! Buy a Scotsman whisky I'd sooner give fire water to the Indians."

Turning away he knew he had just made an enemy, but Sam didn't care. As a Corporal he had had to suffer his childish remarks and callous insults, but not anymore.

One Saturday after the battalion had returned from an exercise in Denmark, Phil Peters and three other lads of 8 Platoon hired a car for the weekend. Finding themselves in Reading they had a few drinks, then went on to a dance hall where some of the local yobs taking offence to who they danced with set upon the four Paratroopers. Being outnumbered five to one, they were not only beaten up, but badly injured with wounds inflicted by iron bars and bicycle chains. All four ended up in the Cambridge, some with multiple broken limbs.

The next Saturday, half the battalion left camp for Reading, to be shown the dance hall by Phil Peters the only member of the four capable of walking. At 09.00 pm. that evening they systematically cordoned off the entrances and exits.

Understandably not many of the males inside the hall liked the dance being halted, to be lined up against one wall, but a smashed nose or a broken rib soon convinced them.

Peters then began his identity parade. With his jaw wired up from being broken in three places, he walked down the line, as he came to someone he remembered he could do no more than nod his head, but that was enough. The individual concerned was instantly pounced on, to be dragged outside for hospitalization.

'D' Company only heard about this later, for they spent that weekend still in Denmark on an escape and evasion exercise. This was an individual test for the members of the Company, to keep them on their toes. With no food or money each man was turned loose to run a gauntlet of Danish Army, police and Reserve Auxiliaries.

If they eluded capture, to reach the safety of the final destination all well and good. However, if caught they were put through the wringer by the intelligence interrogators and military police. This was not pleasant for the object of the exercise was to see if those captured could be made to talk.

Reg Berrill was thinking that a transfer to the Battalion Band wouldn't go amiss when he got back to Aldershot. Here he was hungry, wet through, shivering with cold, dead tired from lack of sleep and what for, 'nothing' he said to himself, 'nothing, this is a stupid exercise.'

Stupid maybe; however, he was still not prepared to give up, for capture he knew was far worse than this. Instead he was devising a plan that would keep him out another night. Huddled in a bush for cover, he had been watching a road bridge for the last three hours. This crossed a large river, the last real obstacle in Reg's way, which once across would leave him with only another twelve miles to go. This he could easily complete that night.

As miserable as he was, Reg was not going to be rushed. Although he could see no one guarding the bridge, it didn't mean it wasn't being watched. But now with dusk approaching he decided to chance it. Leaving his bush, he climbed up to crouch beside the road. With no traffic coming Reg began to walk, hoping in this way anyone observing would mistake him for just another local pedestrian.

Half way across he almost bolted back, as a figure appeared walking from the other end, but checked himself when he saw it was only an old woman. Berrill took no notice of the bent forward little old lady with a shawl over her head, a black leather shopping bag in

one hand, and a walking stick to assist her in the other. As they passed he was watching everywhere at once, trying to spot any traps that might be set for him at the other end of the bridge. But on hearing the sound of a weapon being cocked he spun around. What confronted him nearly caused Berrill heart failure.

The sweet little old granny had pulled a snub-nosed sub-machine gun from her shopping bag, and was now happily grinning, as she vibrated up and down spraying Reg with a continual burst of blank fire. It was such a shock, and looked so real with the muzzle flashing and empty cases showering out onto the roadway, that he cowed for a few seconds behind his arms before finally turning to run, with the woman's shouts following.

"Englander come back, I have shot you! You are my prisoner."

The national papers did not rate Scouse Holgarth's conviction of murder headline news, but all of them did report it. Somewhere between pages three and five were found block titles that read something like,

Paratrooper slays Army wife, or *Red Devil kills in cold blood.*

Holgarth had always had this hatred of whores or loose-moraled women, which always came to the surface after having sex with them. This repeatedly had him in brothel-orientated troubles from Singapore to Soho. Unrepentant he still committed these acts of violence. Until one night he went too far.

Betty Gains lived with her husband, a Corporal from 1 Para, in a Grant Square married quarter. There, when her husband was away she would supplement her house-keeping money by going on the game. This ended for her the night she let Holgarth through her door. For after satisfying his lust, he collected a bread knife from the kitchen, cutting her throat with it. Not only did he leave fingerprints on the handle of this, the Battalion Orderly Sergeant saw him with blood on his shirt while returning to the barracks.

The Winchester Court sent him to prison for not less than twenty years. But that did little to erase the smear he had left on the regiment.

Without disturbing the cot, Dave Urwin slowly leaned forward to kiss his eighteen-month-old son on the forehead. Then tip-toeing to the door he pulled it closed, at great pains to do this as quietly as possible.

In the kitchen he sat on a stool to complete dressing himself.

Wrapping puttees around his ankles, he slipped a pair of elastic bungees over his boots to tuck the cuffs of his denims into. Finishing, he stood up, reaching for a half-drunk cup of tea on the kitchen sideboard. As he drained this his wife in dressing gown and slippers carrying their three-month-old daughter came to stand in the doorway.

"You shouldn't have got up pet, I was just coming to say goodbye," he said his voice betraying just a trace of annoyance.

"I was afraid Debbie would waken. I didn't want her to start crying," replied his wife, holding the child's head to shade her sleeping eyes from the kitchen light.

Dave stepping past her into the hall to take his smock jacket off a clothes' hook, pulled it on, fastening the zipper. Then as he placed a green web belt around his waist, he approached his wife to kiss the baby she held in her arms. Then raising his head he kissed her on the lips, the cheek and the forehead.

"Bye, bye love," he said reaching for his beret. "I'll write as soon as I can."

"Goodbye Dave, look after yourself," replied Mary trying not to show the concern she felt.

Picking up a small grip, he opened the door to smile back at her.

"I will." Then turning he stepped through the door closing it behind him without a backward glance.

Three in the morning is an ungodly hour to leave home, but this wasn't why his farewell to Mary was so brief and unemotional. This goodbye had already been said four hours earlier, which would leave him with sweet passionate memories to cherish in the lonely hours of the coming months. As Urwin paused to close the small wrought-iron gate that opened onto the street, he looked back at the silent house, well aware he would not see it or his family again for some time and longed not to go. For the conflict he was being sent to, was one that should have been contained and suppressed three years earlier.

Aden had been a British protectorate for well into the last century, but due to anti-colonial pressures and the expense of maintaining a large military base there, it was now being given independence.

Although steps had been taken to hand the sound political and civil administrational structure over to a reliable pro-Western body of able men, this in practice was proving difficult. Since 5 Para's Radfan operation, dissidents in the northern states had, with the aid of arms

and men from across the Yemen border, gradually moved the war down to the shores of the Gulf of Aden.

In theory, Britain was stage by stage handing over control to all local Authorities. In the North as she pulled the Army out, the Sheikhs and Sultans were given full control of their provinces to govern and administer. They should have had the backing of selected civil servants and their own Federal Army, but threats and killings soon had this able organization broken or non-effective, causing a minor exodus to the comparative safety of Aden town itself, but even here through the instigation of Cairo, Peking and Moscow, intimidation, terror and assassination were fast eliminating the supporters of democracy.

As the Paras filed off the Britannias and VC10s at RAF Khormaksar, they found themselves stepping into an urban environment where the gun man ruled. With the plain clothes' branch of the police having been hunted down and murdered, and the uniformed branch so fearful, they were afraid to do their job. It was left to the British squaddie once again to maintain law and order.

Aden's main function for the last century, had been that of guarding the entrance to the Red Sea, and in so doing, the Southern approach to the Suez Canal. As such, it had grown by being a duty-free port, where liners and freighters halted to re-fuel and allow passengers to buy trinkets and commercial goods. These visits had now dried to a trickle, for it was far too dangerous to browse about in the local shops and stalls. As for the British serviceman who had over the years sweated and burned, condemned to a tour here, it had been the ass hole of the world.

Built on bare volcanic rock in a landscape of sea, sand, and broken hills it was just beginning to reap the benefit of its location. A large modern business area had sprung up surrounded by luxury shops, office blocks, and modern flat complexes, while spreading out from these, were new estates of concrete and brick homes for the more prosperous Arabs.

Even within the shanty settlements on the outskirts could be found radios, refrigerators, and the latest Japanese and West German cars. But alongside this picture of abundance, terrorists freely operated through the streets and alleyways. Rival factions, Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY), National Liberation Front (NLF), and others, fought and murdered if not the British, then each other in their bloody design to take power.

Five Para's area of policing was a mixture of the old town,

bordered by shanty areas and a new sprawling Arab housing complex. The battalion that 5 Para relieved had during its tour attempted to maintain a presence and keep order, by sending mobile vehicle patrols through the streets, from a tented base camp two miles away beside Khormaksar Airfield.

The new Commanding Officer, Colonel Hanning, 'C' Company's old OC took one look at this set-up and decided it was not satisfactory. Within the first week he had devised a plan that would allow his battalion to occupy and dominate their area, hopefully to curb the snipers and grenade throwers who were constantly attacking the patrols.

At 0200 hours in the chilling morning coolness that at that time penetrated the normally hot humid air, three separate convoys set out from the battalion base camp. Each was one of the rifle Company's A, B, and C. They had been given a third of the area apiece to take up residence in.

'C' Company's new home was a recently abandoned police station, but before full occupation was made the Company took a grip of its area. Key points, crossroads and high vantage points, were seized and held for the next twenty-four hours, while saturation patrolling both by foot and vehicle was carried out.

At first no response was made by the Arab terror groups, until the second day when the patrolling was pruned down, with the emphasis changed to specific jobs and taskings.

One of the earlier contacts was with a grenade thrower, who failed to pull the pin, his target the OC's Land Rover. As the driver braked, pulling the vehicle up onto the curb to avoid passing over it, the OC bailed out, followed by Sam Kyle who was hitching a lift to the base area.

Both men seeing the Arab responsible went in pursuit, the Major following him down an alley while Sam, hoping to cut the man off, dived into a shop then through it to the alley behind. Spotting the would-be assassin about to slip up an adjoining passage, he took a snap shot tumbling him into a doorway, the sound of his rifle shot giving an ear-splitting echo through the narrow confine of the alleyway.

Both he and the OC arrived over the corpse together.

"Good shot eh?" commented the Major.

"Thanks Sir," acknowledged Sam.

"Not you Sergeant Kyle — me!" retorted the OC. "I fired the shot."

He said this smiling at Sam's little joke. But the smile faded when Kyle insisted he had shot the Arab. This could have become a childish squabble if they hadn't decided to inspect the body, finding twin fatal bullet holes.

Initially sleep was at a premium. From day one, the men occupying the police station sweated and laboured, both in maintaining their patrol programme and in transforming the station into a secure defensive post. Thousands upon thousands of sandbags were first filled, then carried either onto the roof to build sentry posts, or placed around the outside perimeter in walls or reinforced sangars. Fronting this, but tight up against it, banks of head-high barbed wire were strung.

From start to finish this took close to three weeks, but had in the end successfully isolated the Company location like an island, from its potentially dangerous neighbours. The front of the station faced on to a main street of closely packed shops, while to left and right, across twenty metre gaps were high walls protecting the courtyards of houses.

The back was the only direction from which real danger could come. Here a bare sandy space stretched two hundred metres to a built up area, with houses, flats and a large gold domed mosque that dominated its surroundings.

From within these banks of buildings, fire points could be and were used to snipe at 'C' Company, almost daily.

Most of these acts of aggression against the soldiers, were in the main amateurish and ineffective, like the grenade thrower who forgot, or didn't know how to pull the pin out.

In regard to these attacks, Britain must accept partial blame for bringing it on herself. Having programmed a timetable for handing over political control, and setting a date when all troops would be leaving, the terrorists feeding on this steadily increased their murderous pressure, giving the world the impression that Britain was not withdrawing from Aden, but being forced out.

Deaths to the soldiers in shoot-out engagements were rare, but murders occurred at the rate of two or three a week. This was hard to counter, as service personnel could still move freely about, either to visit or shop, and because of it they were the ones who died.

The reason these people were being killed so easily, was at first a mystery until Billy Kennedy and Reg Berrill stumbled on the answer. After completing a morning detail, they found the opportunity to skive off to a bar in the Crater district, for a sly beer. Having finished, Reg

was just about to step onto the street when he caught sight on its other side of a blond, civilian dressed, European male. He had just pulled a pistol out from under his shirt, to hurry forward aiming it at the back of an RAF Corporal's head, who was walking just in front of him.

Reg instinctively snapped up his Stirling sub-machine gun, to fire two shots. The blond gun man dropped in his tracks, one bullet in the neck, the other in his brain. The RAF Corporal at first bewildered, could do no more than thank Reg, but within minutes as the truth sank in began to babble and sweat.

The military police were tickled pink over Reg's kill, for it solved a puzzle they had been stuck on for months. The gun man was discovered to be an east European. One of a group whose purpose was to aid the terrorist, by murdering unarmed British servicemen in the streets. This had been very effective, for no one could be suspicious of another European approaching from behind them.

Having taken hold of their area by the scruff of the neck, the battalion now began enforcing their presence on the community, both to assure the peaceful members of the population, and to deter the terrorist. So with five months to go before the pull out, 5 Para got down to keeping order in the streets and alleyways of their district.

Once it was discovered that the Paratroopers shot back, most of the gun men and trouble-makers left for softer areas, where retribution was less. But now and again the odd idiot would have a go.

Like the young Arab wearing a red shirt, who ran out of one of the shops across the street from 'C' Company's location, to fire a pistol at the sandbag emplacements. Having emptied his weapon, he ran into another shop slamming the door behind him to flatten his back against it, just like in the movies. Tom Starbrook on sentry in one of the roof sangars, at first taken by surprise recovered to calmly cock and aim his Gimpy at the centre of 'red shirt's' back. The burst he fired first shattered the plate glass door, then threw him in a bloody, bullet riddled heap to the middle of the shop floor.

However, the real danger to the men of 'C' Company came not from within their area. Unable to provide the manpower some districts of Aden had to be left unpoliced. Here the main terror organizations nested and operated.

One that gave continual trouble bordered on their chief communication road leading out of the area. Practically every day a grenade would be thrown, from out of one of the cluster of rattan weaved dwellings flanking this road. The timing and accuracy were

farcical, prompting most not to take the off target explosions too serious.

Not, that is, until one morning when 'Muffer' Pridmore and the Company OC Major Mike Carrol, while driving in an open Land Rover found themselves bringing the game to a head.

The grenade, when it was thrown, could always be heard, as the striker hit with a distinct pop of the fuse igniter. On hearing this, you could normally accelerate away. But this time Pridmore found it arcing in front of him, leaving no choice except to turn down an adjoining dirt roadway. As he spun the Land Rover into the corner, the Russian RG4 grenade went off, sending Major Carrol slumping out the doorless side of the Land Rover.

Major Carrol was not his Company Commander, Pridmore was only a member of three patrols attached to 'C' Company to support and gather intelligence, while the area was in occupation. But in these few weeks, the OC, a hard dedicated professional officer had shown he was a man worth serving under.

With a cloud of dust rising from the sudden stop of wheels, Pridmore in a rage at the death of the OC rushed over to the only solid structure around, a plaster walled coffee house. From within, faces were peering through the large front window, straining up from their benches and stools to see what the explosion and sudden vehicle noise was. Pridmore blinded with fury, sprayed bullets from his Stirling through the window causing carnage within. Then running back, his chest tightening with remorse to recover his OC's body, he was brought up short by the sight of him climbing out of a roadside ditch beating the dust from his shirt and denims.

"Next time Pridmore, warn me you're going to take corners that sharp, you damn near broke my neck," scolded the Major, then looking about enquired of the shooting.

Pridmore grabbing his arm began to drag the Officer towards the Land Rover.

"I'll tell ya later Sir, get aboard! You and me got to scamper fast."

The next morning, as 9 Platoon cordoned the road off, Colonel Hanning personally directed the Royal Engineer bulldozer driver in levelling the rattan cotchy huts. After broadcasting over a loud hailer in his best Oxford English to the Arabic speaking natives, a warning that devastation was about to descend, he set the bulldozer to clear all habitation a hundred metres back from the tarmac roadway.

Just after dawn, an open three-ton lorry drove casually through the streets on its way into the Crater district.

There was no hurry, for it was nothing more than a routine visit to the local police station. Crater was aptly named, being a suburb of Aden centred in an old extinct volcano. The rim so jagged, only two entrances led into the district. Because of this natural enclosure, its security had been left to the police, who up to now had been fulfilling their duties adequately. But due to constant intimidation, threats and the awareness that soon they would be alone, without the support of the British Army they decided to change sides.

As the three-tonner turned into the gate of the police station, it came under machine gun and rifle fire from several different points. The Sergeant in command with the driver beside him died immediately, while the men in the back who were mostly dozing hardly stood a chance either. Of the twelve soldiers, six were killed, three wounded and two forced to surrender, only one escaped to hold up unseen across the street in a disused house for thirty-six hours, until rescued.

Awakening to what had happened a mob gathered, then incited by the blood began to go berserk. After hacking the bodies to pieces with knives and axes, they seized those that were still alive. One of the wounded was tied to a wheel of the lorry, then set alight with petrol. He screamed, to the delight of the crowd around him, for a good two minutes.

Another with a chain around one leg was attached to a police Land Rover then dragged to death through the adjoining narrow streets. The other wounded soldier, and the two prisoners were staked out in the police compound, where the women set about skinning them alive. An hour before, these men — from an English County Regiment — had been asleep in their base camp tents.

Rescue was at hand, for on hearing the shooting, men had moved quickly to the volcano rim. Foot patrols from a Highland regiment reported by radio they were ready to go in, then waited for the OK. A Cavalry Lieutenant commanding two Saladin armoured cars, placed himself at one of the rim entrances overlooking the police station. Then frantically reporting the scene below, requested he be allowed to open fire with his 76 millimetre guns.

This was refused. ‘They’ had decided not to act until the situation became clear. Through the powerful telescopic gun sights, the crew could see vividly the gory, sickening drama below, which turned their stomachs, while praying to be allowed to take revenge. The

Lieutenant, now with tears of frustrated rage streaming down his cheeks, begged in vain into his radio to engage the savages around the police station, permission never came.

The news of this slaughter spread quickly, hardening hearts throughout the Garrison.

The first person to reap a backlash from this was a young Arab who had been stopped by one of 'C' Company's foot patrols; on being searched he was found to be carrying a concealed grenade. Reacting against the rough way he was treated when thrown into the back of a Saracen armoured car, he began to boast of killing English soldiers and his intent to kill more.

At the Company location where he was to have been held until sent on under escort, he unfortunately became aggressive, kicking out at the two soldiers restraining him. Their reply to this was a rifle butt in the ribs, but still not subdued he made the mistake of spitting in 'Taff' Lewis' face.

Colour Sergeant Lewis was in charge of the three 'C' Company patrols at the location and as such co-ordinated everything on the Intelligence side.

Normally he would have placed the Arab in one of the disused cells until he could be taken away for charging and interrogation. But with saliva dripping from his cheek the now angry Welshman altered this procedure. Twisting one arm behind the Arab's back, then gripping black oily hair he bent his head around to one shoulder. In that position the Arab youth was frog marched to a separate cell in the rear of the station and flung in.

The cell was one already occupied by a half-caste Somali Arab, his skin a blotchy dirty brown, with scraggy black matted hair and a pock-marked face. His build was big and muscular, but mentally he was unstable with an insatiable homosexual hunger, which was why he was in the cell in the first place, for being a menace to the community. Almost continually he would pace his confine, but on hearing Lewis and the prisoner coming he had stopped, waiting and watching. As the Arab was pushed into the cell, 'The Beast' as he was called, took hold of him with grunts of glee. Tearing the loin cloth from around his waist, the youth was forced face down across one of the wooden cots then holding the now screaming younger man's legs apart began to rape him with an already stiffened erection.

"So you've killed British soldiers have you boyo," taunted the Colour Sergeant wiping the drying spit from his face.

The terrorist was left in this cell for three days, being raped almost

hourly while 'The Beast' was awake. This soon became a focal point where bored, off duty soldiers could spend a few minutes to mock, jeer and cheer.

Lowering his binoculars, Captain Aldrich studied the front of a newly-built three-storey shop complex with the upper two floors having been constructed as flats. From inside an opposite building, but further down the street, Aldrich had remained since before dawn concealed behind drawn shutters observing, waiting for unknown but specific individuals to show themselves.

Within the room waiting with him were three others, Corporal Jim Sinclair, 'Muffer' Pridmore and an Arab dressed in plain indiscreet untidy shirt, trousers and sandals. This man was one of the few staunch British supporters still prepared to give assistance. Until recently he had been a member of the Special Branch, but because of killings and assassinations which decimated his colleagues, he was forced to resign his job. This however, did not deter him from lending aid when asked, for the need to avenge his dead comrades still smouldered within him.

As the Arab and the British Captain crouched side by side, squinting into the bright midday light, a young blonde woman, in a light blue dress appeared from the doorway leading to the flats.

The Arab without showing emotion slowly raised one hand to point towards this woman, speaking in a low, but firm voice, "That is her and that is the man behind." His finger now indicating a tall dark, but also European male following. Both stopped at the kerbside as a taxi parked a few doors up, started its engine then glided the short distance to collect the waiting couple.

"She does not have her handbag, perhaps today no one will die." This statement again came from the Arab, but now betraying a hint of relief.

Aldrich after fixing the faces of both in his mind, lowered his binoes. Behind him Jim Sinclair also leaning forward straining hard to take in all details of the two, but for a much more personal reason. He wished to mark them well.

The couple were believed to be an East German murder team, responsible for the death of four Scottish soldiers. Their battalion was recruited locally within Lanarkshire, these men who were dying were Sinclair's kinsmen and neighbours.

"Hassan do you think you could provide us with a sketch of the flat they are staying in?" The Arab pondered the Captain's request for

some seconds before responding.

"I will try to gain this through a friend who knows the builder, but it may take two, three days."

"I would appreciate it as soon as you can," was the Officer's quiet but serious acknowledgement as he turned to again observe the flats, this time with a tactical eye.

At dusk the four men slipped away from their hide, through friendly shadows and darkened alleys. The reason for the day long vigil had been brought about because of a suspicious Lance Corporal of 'C' Company, who had noted on two occasions, the blonde and her male companion entering and leaving the area.

From that small piece of information, the Battalion Intelligence Officer was able to arouse enough interest from others to be given the services of Hassan. He, through discreet enquiry and paying of bribes, was able to discover that the two Germans were trained professional killers on loan from their Iron Curtain Country.

The four Jocks had each died while off duty and alone shopping, by having a small calibre automatic pistol placed at the back of their heads, fired by a pretty smiling unsuspicious blonde.

The Commanding Officer on being advised of the identity of the German couple, called for Captain Aldrich who was the Second-in-Command of patrol Company, and given a licence to eliminate them but discreetly, no fuss and void of all post recriminations. Having *seen* his targets, the flat and studied its surrounding area, he set about formulating a plan and picking the men he wished to implement it.

Three nights later a borrowed Mercedes taxi showing no lights, silently coasted to a halt in the alley to the rear of the German's flat. In the few seconds it was stationary, from the front and back passenger doors, five figures scrambled out in a low scurry, to press themselves amongst the wall shadows. Once the taxi had disappeared out of the alley, the five men slipped through a doorway, to spend the next twenty-four hours laying up in a vacant flat above the Germans.

Throughout the next day the five, Aldrich, Sinclair, Urwin, Pridmore and 'Tam' MacSweeny slept, kept watch and waited. Their dress was unconventional, bare headed, black parachute nylon pyjama suits and boot polish blackened plimsoll, while faces and hands were thick with camouflage cream. Around each's waist was a web belt that carried pistol holsters and knife sheaths.

The pistols were of assorted types and calibre, taken from captured or killed terrorists, for no British weapons were to be used. All also

carried knives, except Urwin who instead had brought his jungle chopping gollock, and 'Tam' MacSweeny a cut throat razor which never left his hand.

With the sun beginning to set, the Paratroopers crept down the stairway to take up their positions for entering the lower flat. Urwin one side of the door, Captain Aldrich the other, with Pridmore the biggest and heaviest in the party directly in front of it. As Pridmore was given the nod to knock by Aldrich all waited with blades drawn, for the firing of pistols was to be avoided.

With his weaponless hand 'Muffer' tapped a cheerful knock on the door. From within an Arab voice answered, to be repeated prior to the door opening a fraction in order that identification be made. The soldiers who had remained silent but tense took instant advantage of this hoped for act.

Pridmore threw his weight at the ajarred entrance, bulling his way into the room. As he moved, Aldrich and Urwin followed adding their bodies' force behind his in a stampede effect. The short tubby moustached Arab who opened the door was bowled backwards, then seized by Pridmore who stabbed him to death with three sharp knife thrusts. Urwin catapulting forward carried on making for the second occupant of the room, seated at a side wall desk staring at the mêlée bursting in.

He was also an Arab, mid-twenties, dressed in dark trousers and flowered shirt. Recovering from this sudden shock he pulled open a top drawer to his desk, reaching inside with one hand. This hand was broken and badly severed by a downward chop of Urwin's gollock. Dave instantly dropped this weapon to grab the man's head, sealing his scream with a hand gripping the mouth.

He died within seconds as Sinclair's knife twice entered his heart. To do this he had to plunge his blade from behind Urwin's unintentionally blocking body. Not waiting to inspect his handiwork he continued on through a bedroom door. Dave released the limp head to recover his weapon from the floor, but not before a flush of blood coughed from the mouth stained his hands in a thick red smear.

Hastily following the Scot into the bedroom he found himself vomiting as he moved. On discovering it empty both returned to the main room. Sinclair seeing him retching, inquired if he was OK. Urwin wiping his bloody hand on a pant leg, before clearing the fluid from his lips and chin replied, "Ya, I'm alright! It's the stomach that can't handle it."

With Captain Aldrich and MacSweeny also returning, having both

rushed into and confirming the kitchen and second bedroom were clear, the anti-assassins began preparing the room for an ambush. After dragging the two corpses into a bedroom, Aldrich ordered his men to rearrange the furniture to give free access of movement, or present an obstacle.

He did this in short agitated whispers, agitated because, like the others, he was under stress and keyed up from their recent killings; whispers because the building and street outside was now quiet as the evening curfew was clearing everyone indoors. Having positioned his men, Pridmore. Urwin, Sinclair and himself in the main room with MacSweeny on watch at a darkened bedroom window, they waited.

The lights of the room were now switched on, but not before the blinds had been closed, this gave the impression of occupation while excluding outside observation.

The room should have been the flat's living room, but was now converted to an office used by a political branch of the National Liberation Front, for their posters and leaders' pictures decorated every wall, while piled about the room were leaflets and more posters which either delivered a propaganda message or dramatised events implying British atrocities.

Although Aldrich constantly checked his watch, he knew their wait would not be long, for this was the Germans' only known accommodation which they always returned to just before curfew. After several minutes of tense waiting MacSweeny warned the others that the taxi had just pulled up outside.

With tightening stomachs, the Paratroopers prepared themselves, ready to enact their Captain's simple but cold-blooded plan. 'Tam' MacSweeny stood to one side of the door, his hand on the turned knob, so as to be able to pull it open towards him in one smooth movement. Aldrich, Pridmore and Sinclair waited to rush out the moment it was pulled aside. Urwin was stationed further back and to one side of the entrance. With hands tightening on their cutting weapons, all five listened with growing anxiety as footsteps were heard climbing to the outside landing.

The knock only got as far as its first tap before MacSweeny wrenched it open. Aldrich reaching forward grabbed the first figure he saw, a tall handsome clean shaven Arab. He, the Captain threw into the room for Sinclair to push against a barricade of desks and chairs. Before he could recover or cry out, Urwin killed him by cleaving his gollock into the man's brain.

As he was being passed into the room, Pridmore charged through

the door barging into the blue dressed blonde. She, he brushed aside with a punch to the face, but in so doing, lost hold of his knife which dropped to the floor. Without pausing he continued on, to lock his right hand on the throat of the male German behind her, while catching the right hand with his left, which had begun to fumble frantically at a concealed bulge in his waist belt beneath a loosely worn shirt.

This dark-haired German was tall and strong, but no match for Pridmore who was taller, stronger and more determined. Pushing him against a wall, unable to cry out, with the hand still around his throat, Pridmore shot his head forward, head-butting him semi-unconscious, whereupon he sunk his teeth into and bit off the end of the German's nose, spitting it back into his face. He then died from repeated stab wounds through the side of his chest, delivered by a grim-faced Captain Aldrich.

Meanwhile, Sinclair had dealt with the blonde, first kicking her handbag away as she snatched for it while on the floor. Then he ensured her mouth remained quiet with another kick to her chin.

"Now hurry get them both inside, don't hang about. Move! Move!" ordered Aldrich in sharp direct commands, allowing himself to speak for the first time above a whisper. While he and Pridmore half-carried and dragged the male back in the room, MacSweeny assisted Sinclair to pull the girl, one on each arm after them.

Now whispering again the Captain directed everyone with waves of his bloody knife to a watch position or to work. "Pridmore door, MacSweeny back to your window," then to Sinclair and Urwin, "Get her tied and gagged, then move these," pointing to the two corpses. "Into the bedroom with the others. We still have twenty minutes yet."

They began this task, by first peeling strips of black masking tape from where it had been carried, stuck to their pant legs. With this her mouth was sealed and her hands secured behind her back. Before the bodies could be moved 'Tam' whispered a warning from the bedroom door.

"Su! Su!" he called to Aldrich, "the taxi fella, he's coming up."

"Bloody hell," cursed the Captain in angry annoyance. Then bracing up, prepared himself and his men to deal with this added crisis.

"By the door big man," he ordered Pridmore. "Leave it slightly open but just enough so he can see it's open. When he comes through pass him back to your muckers," he nodded towards Urwin and Sinclair, now speaking to them.

“Kill him but make it clean and quick, we don’t want to bugger this up now.”

Dressed in a white ankle length cotton robe, the young shaven-headed taxi driver, seeing the door slightly ajar, pushed his way in.

Pridmore’s shove propelled him towards his two killers, but on stumbling over one of the bodies, unintentionally dived through them, somersaulted across one of the blocking desks. MacSweeny, standing by the bedroom door seeing this, sprang like a cat to arrive in front the Arab just as he, confused and disorientated, ambled to his feet.

With the ease of someone who looked have had prior experience ‘Tam’ arced his razor upwards a backhanded sweep, cutting deep into the full width of the taxi-driver’s throat. With his voice pipe severed the Arab silently stood for a moment wide-eyed and staring, his hands clutching a blood gushing fountain at his neck. Slowly he sank to his knees, then toppled face down to die.

“Come on,” ordered Aldrich, “it’s getting too dicey in this place, we’ll take our chances at the RV. Sinclair you lead, I’ll follow — Pridmore, Urwin bring the woman. MacSweeny watch the rear. Right let’s move.”

Twenty minutes later in the shadows bordering a pre-selected corner of waste ground, the five fugitives and their prisoner waited.

Aldrich’s decision in leaving the flat was a hasty one, prompted by a desire to get out while still undetected. For in one moment their luck could easily swing away from them. As successful as the operation had been, he knew their main weapon of ruthless surprise would not last.

Although the curfew was rigidly enforced, the troops could not be everywhere allowing ample opportunity for messengers and party members to carry out secretive visits to the flat However, now they found themselves at their arranged pick-up point earlier than intended.

The danger of which although realized, did not sink in to all, until Sinclair, sited at the end of a small cement block wall, alerted everyone with two low clicks of his fingers. The others crouching beside the same wall looked up to see a ‘C’ Company patrol, about to sweep across the area of waste ground towards them from the far side.

Aldrich indicated to everyone to flatten out, hoping they would remain unseen, for only a handful of key people knew this evening’s business was taking place. Pridmore pulled his gagged captive into the wall to shelter her light-coloured dress from detection by half covering her with his body, while circling his arm around her head to place his

knife against her soft throat. Then looking into the girl's frightened blue eyes with a half leer, the blood from her dead colleague's bitten nose still on his lips, he slipped the other hand under her dress to pass a finger around the elastic panties, pushing it deep into her vagina.

In this way they lay for some minutes until Sinclair again snapped his fingers, having watched the last man of Sam Kyle's patrol fade into the gloom of a near-by alley. Pridmore, more intent on stimulating a response with his probing finger, did not appreciate or care how close disaster had been.

For Sinclair found himself holding his breath, as Phil Peters, the patrol machine gunner passed within ten feet of him. If spotted there would have been no challenge, only a long burst of 7.62 mm rounds, their dress would have seen to that.

Shortly after this, two Land Rovers with darkened headlights approached across the open space from a roadway beyond. As the first one, covered with a canvas canopy slowed to a halt Captain Aldrich stepped forward to exchange passwords with 'Taff' Lewis. Once done, the prisoner and the snatch party all bundled themselves into the back out of sight.

With the second, stripped down, machine gun mounted Land Rover following the first, a route was taken out of the township to a remote desert track junction. There awaiting them were another two Land Rovers, these belonging to Sinclair's local regiment.

Aldrich took the hand of the big Scottish Captain who had been waiting for him, they were close friends having graduated from Sandhurst together, where their ferocious approach at playing water polo earned them a lasting reputation.

"Were you successful Adam?" asked the Scot as they clasped hands.

"We've got her in the back, she's all yours," smiled the Paratrooper.

"Well let's have her in my Rover, you don't want to be hanging about here."

Without courtesy or concern the blonde, now with masking tape binding her ankles as well, was dragged from one vehicle to another. As Urwin and Pridmore leapt back aboard, Aldrich called to end this brief meeting.

"Take good care of her Ian. I'll come around tomorrow evening, you can buy me a drink."

Then, with a command to the driver, he sped off.

"You'll get more than one," silently promised the big Scotsman, as

he turned to lean into the back of the German's new confine. She lay on the floor guarded by two tam-o-shantered soldiers who sat, rifles across their laps. When the Officer began to speak, she turned her boot-bruised face to look up.

"You may not be aware of this Lassy," he began in deadly earnest, "but we are a family regiment, there are two brothers who are looking forward to having a wee word with you."

No official mention of the bodies left at the flat was ever made by either side, nor was a young pretty blonde East German girl terrorist handed over to the military police.

Shading his eyes against the sun's glare Dave Urwin studied the buildings at the back of 'C' Company's location, beyond the open space. It was unusual not to hear something in the way of gun fire coming out of this place and Major Carrol was curious as to why. Being unpoliced the terror groups ruled in there, but which terror group was constantly in dispute.

For the last week few shots had been directed towards the Company, instead FLOSY and the NLF had been shooting it out in a power struggle to decide who would be the top dog, when the British pulled out.

The OC had been receiving reports both from local sources and from refugees passing through their main check point at the permanent road block on the beach route; the word was the two main terrorist bodies had agreed on a cease fire to concentrate on killing more British. While also from the refugees they spoke of a unit of regular Egyptian soldiers who were about to infiltrate into Aden to assist in this killing.

Urwin spent all day meticulously inspecting, both with the naked eye and through binoculars, every window rooftop and balcony, in an attempt to discover something out of the ordinary, but without success; flats remained occupied, washing was placed out and then taken in — at all times the people carried on as normal.

While from the mosque the Mula, at each appointed hour regularly through the day, called the faithful to prayer. At dusk, Urwin left the roof-top, sandbagged emplacement to inform 'Taff' Lewis that he had found nothing to report.

The prelude to the battle was a Blindicide rocket that struck the outside of the back wall. This rocket was intended for use against armoured vehicles but could easily penetrate masonry walls. The blast brushed aside the added outer sandbagging to enter the location's HQ

accommodation room, punching a bloody hole through one of the cooks as he sat with his back to the wall, reading. The bits of molten metal then spewed in a funnel across the room causing even more casualties. Sam Kyle who had been confirming patrol names and details with the Company Clerk at the time, took some of this blast in the back of his thighs, inflicting lacerations, but nothing serious.

This had happened in late evening with little else occurring until the eastern rays of the rising sun were full in the faces of those in the police station. Then the tell-tale crack and thump of bullets passing overhead, signalled that something different was laid on for this day. As the fire built in volume the accuracy also improved with rounds ricocheting or imbedding themselves in walls and sandbags.

At first everyone stood-to returning fire at the snipers, likely snipers or just where they thought snipers might be. Major Carrol soon put the blocks on this, detailing 7 Platoon and the patrol Company elements to the roof and the back of the building to fight the battle. While ensuring the other two Platoons carried out the normal patrol programme within the Company's area.

As the morning progressed the firing never stopped, with bullets constantly coming in and going out. But this had now settled down to a game. With the sun gaining height the defenders in the police station could begin to pin-point the odd enemy position which resulted in long range individual duels.

Patiently men would wait hunched over a rifle or machine gun in one of the many firing slits, concealing themselves as much as possible while trying to catch a fatal glimpse of the gun men opposite.

Billy Kennedy had it down to a fine art; when the bloke on the other side wouldn't play he would break for a brew, boiling his water over a handy hexamine cooker while sitting in a chair on top of a table, where he had made a fire slit for himself at one of the first floor windows. There he sat watching and waiting, playing a deadly game of cat and mouse. Several times bullets had struck his sandbagged window and three times he fired at dark pin head size silhouettes he knew to be gunmen.

The big problem was locating the enemy fire position, for the buildings beyond not only extended broadly across their front, they also stretched away in some depths, giving ample scope for concealment. This disadvantage changed for the Paratroopers at 1400 hours that afternoon.

Just after 1200 hours all incoming firing ceased which puzzled everyone until it was realized the enemy had stopped for lunch, but at

1400 hours almost on the dot they began again. This must have been the Egyptian regulars for during the meal break they had taken the time to clean and oil their weapons. This was a sign of professionalism, but they weren't quite professional enough.

The modern bullet is propelled by a smokeless charge giving off a very light tell-tale signature that is practically impossible to see. However, if a round is fired through an oily barrel the friction of the bullet will cause it to burn giving off a distinct puff of pale blue smoke. The enemy had oiled their barrels well.

With the sun now in 'C' Company's favour the tiny fluffs of smoke stood out like red flags. From all the sandbagged emplacements cries and fire orders went up, with men frantically plotting newly given away positions on panoramic range cards.

One of the rooftop sangars had been occupied since the shooting first started by Urwin, Sinclair and Paddy Kieran. Lulling over a brew of tea through inactivity, the first sight of the rifle smoke caused a scramble with mugs spilling and ammunition boxes being stumbled over.

Dave Urwin on seeing the gift of targets pulled a table longways below the fire slit, then climbing onto it braced his back against the rear wall, his head almost touching the low corrugated iron roof. Taking the Gimpy from Kieran he locked its legs in a vice like force into the front sandbags with his feet.

"I'm going to start with the far targets and work in," he told the others.

"First that geezer in the top right hand window in the block of flats behind the mosque." Jim Sinclair consulted the range card pinned to the front wall,

"That's 950 Davy, a desperate way out."

"It's still worth a crack," replied. Urwin adjusting his rear sight before taking aim. Firing a three round burst he waited for Paddy to spot his fall of shot.

Kieran resting his binoes on the ledge of the firing slit shouted, "Low! Low!"

Taking aim and bracing himself even more Dave fired again, this time two bursts. Paddy watching through the glasses whooped with surprise as the first burst hit the uniformed machine gunner throwing him and his Russian weapon backwards into the room, the second burst catching the machine gun in mid-air to pitch it into the centre of the floor.

This was but the first scalp to be claimed that afternoon. With methodical thoroughness the Paratroopers now knowing where to aim worked their way from sniper to sniper. At dusk the number of incoming shots had diminished to a trickle.

'C' Company had fired over two thousand rounds with no casualties to themselves, with Intelligence reports revealing later that they had killed or wounded over fifty Egyptian soldiers.

After this shoot-out a calm settled over the district, a spin off for doing such damage to the 'Cairo Kids' from across the Rio Nile. This was unwelcomed by most of the Paras for although safer, it didn't relieve the tightness inside them that still craved revenge for the butchery at the Crater Police Station.

The interlude was not a total bore for it did coincide with a CSE show being held at one of the battalion base camps. With no amenities except radios and a handful of books the men were starved of entertainment. So as everyone could get to see the show, the Company locations sent half their strength on alternate nights.

The first evening two thousand men of mixed regiments and Corps sat on benches, squatted in the sand or perched themselves on assorted vehicles parked in a semi-circle around the make-shift stage. The compère, a slim, dark-haired man with a happy smile was instantly recognized from a run of low budget comedy films he had recently appeared in, set the troops laughing with a string of jokes, very soon he was to become a national celebrity hosting a television action quiz game.

Once everyone was warmed to a happy mood. four long-legged *girls* in high heeled shoes and colourful rhinestone leotards did a bit of a dance to recorded music. This was followed by a top comedian — who was shortly to die an alcoholic, he came on so drunk he couldn't remember how to finish his jokes. The men tolerated this for a limited time, then ended his performance by booing him off the stage. Before the next act could be hurried on, the camp's electric power failed accompanied by groans and cat calls from the audience. After a longish pause a bare-headed Major stepped on to the darkened stage to apologise, and inform everyone the show would have to be scrubbed for the evening. As he left the platform, the compère appeared from the wings with his arms raised.

"Wait! Wait!" he shouted, "hold everything. I've got a library of party jokes I've been dying to tell and this is my big chance, so come on lads sit back down. But first let's have some of those lorries pointed this way with their lights on so you can all see who the funny man is."

For the next two hours, out of what almost turned into a disappointing fiasco, this man produced one of the most memorable evening's entertainment any soldier could have hoped for.

As the night progressed so did the volume of ballistic noise increase from the nearby Arab-controlled areas. Punctuated with Blindicide explosions and ribbons of tracer fire that arched overhead, the laughter of the dark-haired compère and his audience rang through the hot moist evening air.

Twice, spent bullets tinkled onto the stage and were ignored each time, by a man far too devoted to the purpose for which he had come, that of amusing others who were deprived of it through duty to one's country.

The stories he told were of a deep shade of blue, but this offended no one, even the lone WVS women sitting in the front row constantly smiled, but never once blushed. The performance ended with everyone on their feet applauding and cheering, finally returning to locations by lorries, chuckling to each other while trying hard to remember all the jokes. The next night the electricity didn't fail, allowing the original show to take place. But one that couldn't hold a candle to what had been presented the evening before.

CHAPTER 17

Stood for his country's glory fast,

And nail'd her colours to the mast.

Sir Walter Scott

The gentleman addressing 'D' Company, tucked into one corner of a hangar on Khormaksar airfield, was by manner and dress completely out of place. In his early forties, pale skinned, explaining himself in a timid non-military manner, he wore a heavy wool based pin-stripe suit which was causing him to perspire even more than the men he was briefing. This he did aided by a hastily prepared but detailed model of a small island, the layout of which he was at pains to describe.

Earlier in the week a small force of rebels from this island supported by a handful of Egyptian regular soldiers had seized power, arresting its Sultan and at the moment holding him and the members of his household in their small palace, while consolidating their capture.

On the face of it the island didn't look to have much strategic importance. One hundred miles south-east of Aden barely three by ten in area. With no material value, it appeared to be nothing more than a speck of rock and sand sitting on the fringe of the Indian Ocean. However, in the last few months, with Aden being taken from them and the Gulf States asking more and more to be left alone to govern their own affairs, Britain began looking elsewhere in order to provide a base that would enable them to dominate the Southern approach to the Suez Canal, and protect the oil routes out of the Gulf.

This was the importance of the island, for Westminster had only just negotiated a ninety-nine year lease, for the eastern end of the place where it was planned to build an RAF airfield and a small Naval port. The gentleman completing his briefing, now with jacket off and shirt sleeves rolled up, had until two years ago been a Political Adviser to the Sultan. He being the only person with enough knowledge of the small town and port, had been pulled out from behind a London desk and whisked away to Aden.

After his lecture covering the ground and the personalities of the island, Major Coe the OC, stepped up to the model to describe how Delta Company was intending to make their attack, rescuing its ruler and securing the island once again for Britain.

Major Coe notorious for his sense of humour, began by explaining the operation was to be a joint service collaboration. Then with tongue in cheek, confided his doubts on this type of thing, because how could it work when the Army was always late, the Air Force always early and the Navy threw everything right into confusion by religiously being on time.

“Stand in the door!”

The RAF dispatcher’s shout was loud and well heard by all the parachutists swaying in their two double sticks. This was meant to be loud, for he was competing against four very powerful noisy Beverley engines. With eyes firmly fixed on the red and green light, everyone now waited for the signal to leave the aircraft. Dave Urwin stationed number three in the port stick watched through the door, a dark surface below, which he couldn’t make out, but knew to be the sea. With one arm gripping his weapon container, the other steadying himself on the static line above his head, he forced himself tight up against the man in front. This was a positive action for to carry out the coming operation on the ground, a tight grouping in the air was necessary.

“Red on!” cried the dispatcher as the crimson light flashed.

Urwin glanced down, below there was still only sea. “Green on, go!”

The first man leapt out, then the second. Dave came to the door still seeing nothing but sea, not until he was riding down the slipstream did a shore line appear below him. For the tactical purpose of allowing the men to spend as little time in the air as possible the aircraft had flown in at six hundred feet.

When his parachute inflated, Urwin was down to four hundred, by the time he had checked that no one was about to collide with him, he was at three hundred, after lowering his container this left him with two hundred, but still gave him ample time to be able to spot his objective and in so doing orientate himself with the ground.

The Paratroopers were going in at dawn, with the sun not yet over the horizon. But from their vantage points in the sky the town, its harbour, the Sultan’s palace and the surrounding island were clearly visible to them all.

As Urwin’s boots touched, he rolled onto the sandy ground. Unclipping his reserve parachute from across his chest, he threw it away; with the quick release box freed, he struggled out of his harness, to loosen the securing straps of his weapon container. Pulling

a rifle out, he fitted a magazine to it then cocked a round into the breech. Having armed himself, he scooped his equipment up, slipping his arms through its yoke straps as he broke into a sprinting run towards the palace, two hundred metres away.

Of the sixty men of 'D' Company who had jumped, twenty were earmarked to storm this ancient mud and stone walled enclosure. While the rest with machine gun mounted Land Rovers would race through the town to take the customs house and harbour area, holding them until reinforcements arrived by sea, hopefully within the hour. Overhead the first of these Land Rovers was just beginning to tip over the rear sill of a heavy drop aircraft, as Urwin flattened against the north wall of the palace. Loosening his helmet strap, the weight of which he hated, he tossed it to the ground, to be replaced with a beret, taken from inside his airborne smock.

As he was doing this others joined him, Jim Sinclair, Reg Berrill, Billy Kennedy, 'Muffer' Pridmore and Captain Aldrich, limping in with a twisted ankle, received on landing. But immune to its pain, taking a fast check of who he had, led this party down the shadows of the high wall. At its corner he halted to peer around towards the main entrance.

Like an island the walled palace was set well away from any other house or building, the gateway of which being nothing more than two plain, bare, weather-worn heavy wooden doors that swung inwards. Withdrawing his head, Aldrich silently indicated, holding up two fingers, then with a sweep of his arm brought everyone around the corner in a close order extended line.

The two khaki uniformed guards, too involved with watching in a state of overwhelmed inactivity the last heavy drop aircraft roar overhead, didn't at first notice the men advancing out of the morning gloom. When they did, both reacted differently, one bringing his Soviet automatic rifle into the aim, the other slipping through the entrance to slam the thick wooden doors shut. The first hardly stood a chance, cut down by SLR fire and a burst from Pridmore's GPMG.

On reaching the entrance, finding it barred to them, Aldrich directed Jim Sinclair to place two explosive charges against it. Then seeing Colour Sergeant Lewis approaching with more men, down the side of the wall from the direction of the DZ, ordered him to ignite his two charges. With everyone sheltering from the blast, the doors splintered inwards, this was the signal for Lewis to lead his party into the courtyard.

The operation was planned in three phases, the first, gaining entry

to the palace by Captain Aldrich and his gate party, 'Taff' Lewis and another six men would seize control of the courtyard and the entrance to the palace. A third group again to be led by Captain Aldrich would go into the palace to secure the rescue of the Sultan and his family. As the Colour Sergeant stormed through the broken gateway shots were fired from two points, a balcony fronting the palace and a raised low-walled patio below it.

The only way onto the patio, across which led to the entrance to the drab sand-coloured palace, was up a wide flight of steps. It was to these that the Welshman was running when a bullet shattering his right thigh brought him down. ‘Tam’ MacSweeny whose appearance was more comical than fearless because of his shortness, which was highlighted by the tin pot parachute helmet he still wore, following behind stopped beside his helpless Colour Sergeant, to stand firing his rifle at the figures behind the patio wall. In so doing, intentionally or unintentionally he now drew all the enemy’s fire towards himself. Puffs of sand kicked up around him for brief seconds, as he bravely stood returning the shots. Inevitably his luck couldn’t last, this heroic act ended with a bullet in the stomach.

As he fell, Pridmore seeing the rush for the palace was about to collapse stepped into the open gateway. With his gimpy slung from the hip he fired repeated long bursts at the balcony, chipping away sprays of plaster and masonry, driving those shooting back into the palace.

MacSweeny stunned for a moment on his knees clutching a bleeding stomach, rose to his feet with a yell. Ignoring his wound the enraged Glaswegian charged for the steps, pulling a grenade from his front webbing strap as he ran. With a curse he hurled the shrapnel grenade up onto the patio. Three uniformed rifle men seeing the bomb coming their way stood up to run. Whereupon, two were cut down by the fire of others of the storming party, as they fanned out through the gate, the third being blown sideways by MacSweeny’s grenade.

Continuing up the steps his face a distorted expression of hate, he staggered from one wounded Arab to the other. Having picked up an enemy rifle, he shot the first two each in the head, heedless of their cries for mercy. The third, running out of ammunition, he staggered towards, intending to beat to death with the rifle barrel, but was halted by Paddy Kieran who pulled him into a sitting position against the palace wall in order to bandage his wound.

With the entrance to the palace now in the hands of the Paratroopers, Captain Aldrich should have followed through to complete the final phase. Checking his watch the tall dark-haired

officer glanced back down the wall in the direction of the DZ anxiously hoping to see his third attack group arriving.

Time was essential, it had been seven minutes since the first man had stepped out of the aircraft door, now with two thirds of the operation completed and fully in control, through aggressively taking advantage of their surprise arrival, it was vital the momentum be kept going. Aldrich faced with the fact his other party had been held up, decided if the impetus of the assault was to be kept rolling he would have to improvise with the men he had.

Turning to Pridmore he ordered, “Big man I’m leaving you here on your own. Don’t let any of these bastards in or out.” Then gathering the rest of the gate party, he led them into the main palace hallway.

The Island had never been a rich one, relying on sparse fishing and infrequent sea trading, this fact being reflected in the drab appearance and rough texture of the dull cream-coloured interior walls. Lighting for the hall was natural during the day, fed in through high, open frameless windows; at night oil lamps, placed in staggered recesses spaced along the walls, kept this passage lit. These had not yet been extinguished, giving the long high corridor an eerie, street light effect.

Limping, but forcing a brisk pace, keeping in close to the walls, Aldrich led his men towards the end of this long hall. From the plan of the building that he and the others of the assault group had memorised, he knew the hallway turned at right angles to continue on around the inside of the palace.

Off this passage way was a door which if their information was correct would be the final objective, this the entrance to the Sultan’s apartment, where it was assumed he would be held. It was expected he would eventually be executed but done as a propaganda exercise, having first been denounced to his subjects as a corrupt Western Imperialist lackey. With no recent Intelligence to go on, this could have already happened, which was why Captain Aldrich and his Paratroopers were very much striking into the unknown.

Just before reaching the corner of the hall, the officer paused at a stairway leading up to what he knew was an upper floor balcony, which ran completely around the inside of the building overlooking an inner garden. With hand signals and low whispers, for the place was now silent, he re-routed Dave Urwin, Reg Berrill and Billy Kennedy up these stairs.

On reaching the balcony they met a mixed fragrance of jasmine and flower scents which drifted from the garden below. Peering around a pillar at the head of the steps, Urwin found no problem with visibility

for the morning light, unhindered by any form of roofing over the garden was spreading in, to push away the lingering night shadows.

On three sides of the balcony were wooden doors set back in thick walls, which opened into accommodation rooms and living quarters. The fourth side, facing the entrance gate, had no doors, only a plaster wall within the centre, a railed opening overlooking the courtyard, from which they had recently been fired at.

The proof of this was obvious for spent cartridges and debris chipped away by Pridmore's machine gun, lay scattered untidily along the stone flooring. Conscious that the enemy must still be about, but having carefully spied out all likely points of concealment, Urwin with the other two covering was about to cross to the balcony railing, when shots were heard from the rear of the garden.

In the lower corridor, Captain Aldrich had just reached the corner of the hall as the firing started. With his body flattened against the near wall, he warily peered around it, halfway along the passage three Egyptian soldiers, one an officer, were shooting into a closed door. Realizing this was the Sultan's private apartment, which instantly gave him the hope that they just might be in time, the Captain stepped around the corner firing his rifle.

Jim Sinclair caught on the hop by his sudden move, but knowing whatever the target, two rifles would be better than one, followed Aldrich by flinging himself to the far side of the passage. On taking aim down the hall he found one of the Egyptians crumpling to the floor, another turning to run, while the officer leapt backwards over the low stone wall, which bounded the top end of the garden. Sinclair fired at the figure fleeing down the hall, to send him sprawling forward with two rapid shots in his back.

Above them, the other three Paratroopers rushed to the edge of the balcony to see the Officer running across the garden. Without a command all three leaned over the balcony wall, to fire down at the fleeing enemy below. As he fell sprawling into the waters of a central fountain, shots began to come at them. Turning towards the danger, Dave Urwin was confronted by two men, firing from a doorway at the extreme end of the building. Throwing himself flat he began to fire back.

Berrill and Kennedy also turned to face the enemy with both electing to stand, in order to return the fire more swiftly. Reg, intent on aiming, glimpsed from the corner of his eye, with a sudden chill, Kennedy's rifle as it fell to the floor. Aware of what this meant, but dulled to the severity of it by the life and death shoot-out he was

involved in, concentrated on his rifle sights. Still shooting he had to step over his fallen mate as he took the battle towards the two Egyptians who, giving up the fire fight disappeared into the room behind them.

Hotly closing on the now shut door Urwin crossed to the far side, pumping four shots through the centre of it as he did so. Before his ejected spent rounds had clattered to rest on the stone flooring, Berrill's right boot forced the door to spring open, slamming with a bang as it crashed back against the inner wall.

Without hesitation assisted by the momentum of his kick, Reg carried through into the room beyond. Because of the poor light within, he took aim at and almost killed some of the darkly-clad figures pressed against the far wall. With his finger taking up the first pressure on the trigger, he stopped himself just in time, when those he was aiming at threw their arms up to wail in high feminine shrieks.

Berrill could be forgiven for it not being apparent to him sooner, that he was now in the Palace Harem, for the Hollywood version was far from the truth here. No bright airy marbled rooms with sunken pools and skimpy-dressed beauties giggling amongst silken curtains here. Instead the dim light from overhead lamps trying to cut into the gloom, only emphasised the dank colours of the Eastern furniture and rugs within the apartment.

Dressed in black full length unattractive cotton robes, with veils or masks covering their faces, the tall, fat, thin, short women themselves laid this romantic image to rest. Locking his rifle butt into his shoulder, Berrill was still trying to define friend from foe, when from behind him Dave Urwin's rifle fired, sending the women into another screaming uproar.

"Window Reg!" he shouted as his rifle cracked twice more.

Across the room was a small windowed alcove, with shutters that allowed the light to filter only sparsely through its narrow gaps. These gaps caused strips of light from the now rising sun, to beam against wall and ceiling, silhouetting one of the men they were pursuing.

As Berrill dived towards the far wall, escaping from any returning fire, the Egyptian Urwin had fired at, gradually turning sideways from his crouched position just inside the doorway, toppled face up to lie across the entrance. Berrill hugging the wall, moved down it until he stood over the Muslim soldier who, still alive with eyes open and babbling in his native tongue, was slowly leaking blood over the floor.

Pushing the muzzle of his SLR into the alcove, he fired two blind shots towards one corner. As the thunder of the noise vibrating around

its confined space ceased, cries in Arabic were heard. Brining his rifle to bear on the sound, Reg stepped over the body at his feet. With his weapon well away from him the second enemy soldier sat in a corner of the small enclosure, one leg that was bleeding he had pushed out to his front, while the second he sat on, tucked under his buttocks, his hands he waved crossways in front of himself, as he loudly pleaded for surrender.

Reg fired his first shot without aiming, then killed him with a second aimed through the forehead.

Dave Urwin who had been covering Reg from the main room, anxious that others might still be about, but now convinced there were only the two, joined him. As Berrill spun about to push past Urwin, he looked from the dead Egyptian to his rifle several feet away. It was plain the death of this man was a needless killing, but no twinges of misconduct were felt, Dave knew damn well why it had been done.

Stepping out onto the balcony still alert with rifle at the low ready position, his eyes searching every corner and shadow, the powerful scent from below again filling his nostrils, Urwin turned towards his two friends.

Berrill was standing arms at his side, rifle held dangling in one hand, his head bowed as he looked down at the body of Billy Kennedy. He lay collapsed on his stomach, head turned off to one side, eyes half closed, blood seeping from a corner of his mouth, causing a small pool to form around his face. Reg made no effort to attempt first aid or check for signs of life, the half-crown size bloody-edged hole in the back of Billy's neck dispelled any hope of this.

"What do I tell Kathy?" Asked Reg quietly, raising his distressed, but tearless face to stare at Urwin.

Dave said nothing, what could he suggest to put in a letter that would console a sister to accept the fact that the man she had married only eight months earlier, the father of her unborn child, was dead.

The shooting heard above had not gone unnoticed by Captain Aldrich, but he had no intention of reacting to it, his first concern was for the safety of the island's ruler.

With the door half dislodged by its recent shooting, the Captain was about to put his boot to it when he stopped himself. Taking a pace forward he began to pound on the heavy wood with his fist while shouting, "We are British! We are British your Highness. We have come to free you."

After a short pause with no response from within, he indicated to Jim Sinclair with a nod of his head to force it open. The Corporal kicked several times at the wooden door, then joined by Paddy Kieran it gave inwards to hang at an askew angle.

Bursting in ready to fight, the three men found themselves facing two unarmed Arabs. The nearest a tall young man, clean-shaven, but for a thin black moustache, dressed in an all-white robe, with a red and white hatta head scarf secured by a black gogal, stood in the centre of the rug-covered room.

The second, much older than the first, with a dark-lined face and grey beard, was also standing, but behind a desk at the further end of the room. He too was dressed in a robe, but a far richer one of black with gold lacing, and watching the Paratroopers with cold piercing eyes.

Spreading his arms to take a step forward the first Arab began to speak, “Good morning Captain, I am Mohsin Aidrus, Sultan Sayyid Haushabi’s personal secretary.” Introducing himself in perfect English, then half turning to extend a hand towards the older man he continued, “His Excellency would like to thank you and your men for this timely arrival, we were both to be executed this morning.”

For ‘D’ Company this operation was intended and indeed so turned out, to be nothing more than a brief interlude. On taking the palace and the harbour this suppressed any resistance from the local rebels in the town, which allowed two companies of Marine Commandos an unopposed landing on the quay side.

As for the rebels themselves, they and two wounded Egyptians were rounded up during the day by islanders loyal to the Sultan, and beheaded that evening. The next day the men of ‘D’ Company returned to Aden by Naval landing craft, taking with them the wounded Colour Sergeant Lewis and the bodies of Billy Kennedy and ‘Tam’ MacSweeny.

Ticking the last of the lorries off his check list as they were driven up the ramp of the Naval landing craft, Sam Kyle walked back off the dock to confirm his figures. Still with a slight limp from his Blindicide wound, he found a chair and table shaded by an overhead awning. Easing himself into the chair, careful to favour a thigh that remained tender, he removed his beret before studying the column of numbers on his mill board.

Having recovered enough to regain his feet, Sam had been placed on light duties until he was fit to rejoin ‘C’ Company. As every man

was fully committed to one job or another within the battalion, once he had become mobile again it was only natural that he should be used in some way. Roy Allander was the first to snap him up, being taken on as an assistant.

Allander now promoted to the rank of Regimental Quarter Master Sergeant, and as such was responsible to the Quarter Master for all stores and equipment held by the battalion. Roy though, was now a very busy person, for the QM being taken ill with a stomach complaint had been shipped back to Blighty leaving him to don two berets, his and the QM's. This couldn't have happened at a worse time for 5 Para along with the rest of the Aden Garrison were in the final stages of withdrawing. This would normally have been planned, organized and carried out in a systematic manner, but with a war on the doorstep to fight, corners were having to be cut. One of these corners Sam Kyle was at that moment snipping off.

The vehicles he had just supervised in loading were to be taken a short distance out to sea for dumping. With typical British Army accounting Sam had methodically checked off each one noting their registration and engine numbers before receiving a signature of disposal from the Royal Engineer Officer, whose men would be pushing the lorries down the ship's ramp into the drink. This was but a small consignment; back in the Ordnance Depot the battalion had been given charge of mountains of stores and vehicles yet, all to be cleared by the same method.

Roy Allander was doing his best to save what he could. Anything the men could use in the way of clothing or equipment, he would freely issue out. Some items the battalion would need in the future he did what he could to ship back to the UK. but this was difficult because of the situation, the number of vessels for freighting were limited.

If a peaceful pull-out had been allowed Britain would have shipped most of these military goods over a convenient period of time, but with a likelihood of the terrorist groups seizing power the moment her troops had left, this course of action had been shelved. Hence after allocating sufficient stocks to the civil and military authorities who were accepting the fledgling governmental helm, the rest were either salvaged somehow, destroyed, or dumped at sea.

This wholesale abandonment of military goods was not confined solely to equipment. In recent years the number of servicemen, their families and dependants from all three arms stationed in the Garrison had multiplied to several thousand. Many quarters had been built for them, while many more of the new flats and apartments had been

taken over as rented hirings. With the recent conflict suddenly exploding in their midst the standard service accommodation handover-takeover practice was virtually scrubbed. When seats on aircraft were made available the families merely walked out of their front doors carrying what was necessary in suitcases.

This could have led to unlimited looting, but because of the patrolling troops, and a warning that anyone caught looting would be shot by soldiers quite eager to do just that, this crime was never a major one. Of course it would be a lie to say nothing was taken, for the troops themselves freely appropriated anything that would ease their existence.

Having given up the allocated area they originally policed, to pull back into a defended perimeter around Khormaksar airfield, everyone was now living in tents. After a few weeks of patrolling the ghost-towned married quarters, these canvas huts began to bulge with added amenities; army bunks, lockers, and tables, were stacked outside while in their place appeared real beds, wardrobes, hardwood coffee tables, soft chairs and most vital of all, refrigerators. Although not accountable these refrigerators were a sought after item, and not just for personal use.

This Roy Allander found when he attended a camp hand-over conference. As the withdrawal date drew near, the British controlled area gradually shrunk with the troops constantly stepping back giving up what was no longer needed. The next slice of real estate to be released was the camp itself. This was the responsibility of the QM (ie. Roy Allander) who had to give a tally of everything held on strength, then sign it over to his opposite number from a Federal Army Battalion.

This battalion was being brought down from up country to maintain order while the British withdrew. A sound move on paper, but in practice proved a test in ability and competence on their part. Shortly before, all British officers and senior non-commissioned officers, who had been the back bone of this unit were posted back to their parent regiment.

The void this left should have been filled by capable Arab Officers and SNCOs who had been understudying and waiting in the wings to take up the reins. But because of the early pull-out those with command thrust upon them were found to be lacking in both experience and proficiency. The finalizing of this event was conducted in one of the airfield's large RAF administration buildings.

After the brief preliminaries of being introduced, both parties sat

down opposite each other, at a broad highly-polished oak table. The man responsible for overseeing the exchange of the camp was an Ordnance Corps Lieutenant Colonel, who sat at one end.

As he opened the meeting with a short address outlining the sequence in which the hand-over would be managed, Roy Allander produced several sheets of paper containing notes, invoices and equipment lists all accounting for the contents of the camp.

Across from him the Arab Quarter Master sat with no accompanying stationary. Perhaps this was because he could confide much facts and figures to memory, but the 5th Battalion RQMS didn't think so. For aware the man on the other side of the table had Captain's pips on both shoulders of his KD shirt, he also noticed the un-sun bleached V on his right forearm sleeve, where the Lance Corporal stripe had only recently been removed.

When the Colonel finished his spiel, he invited Allander to run through a bulk list, giving the Arab Captain an idea of what was actually in the camp. This took Roy about ten minutes, finishing with a rough estimate of the quantity of barbed wire and steel pickets contained in the perimeter fencing. When asked by the Colonel if he had any questions on what the RQMS had just explained, the Captain across the table leaned forward to inquire of Allander only one thing.

"Do you not have refrigerators on the camp?"

"Yes Sir," replied Allander slowly after a short pause, before turning to give the explanation to the Colonel that they were not included in his list, because they had been acquired by the men for their own use, and not accountable on his ledger.

Before the Colonel could give a judgement on this, the Captain broke in, "How many?" staring hard at Allander.

"On my last check through the lines there seemed to be one in just about every tent. That should make it not far off a figure of sixty," replied Allander in a civil tone, but now dropping the 'Sir'.

The Lance Corporal/Captain hurriedly pulled a note book and pencil from a shirt pocket, then as if ignorant of anyone else in the room, began to work out some elementary sums, while talking to himself under his breath.

"Sixty times twenty-five pounds …"

Roy, well aware of what he was doing, looked to the Colonel at the head of the table, to find him studying hard a sheet of paper he had quickly picked up. He then turned to exchange glances with Sam Kyle who was sitting to one side, but slightly behind him. Sam reacted by

casting his eyes to the ceiling in agreed dismay. That was what Ron thought as well, collecting his papers to return them to a briefcase at his feet, sitting for the remainder of the conference with arms folded.

Lowering the binoculars that hung around his neck, after scanning across shimmering heat-hazed salt pans to his front, Dave Urwin paused, studying the same ground with the naked eye. This, his arc of responsibility, didn't have a lot in the way of interest on offer.

He and the other three men of his patrol, had taken over a small sandbagged emplacement at one end of the airfield. They with the rest of the Company in similar posts around the aerodrome, were to be the Garrison's last line of defence for the withdrawal.

The day before the politicians had completed their exchanges, embarrassingly handing over to the National Liberation Front, who in a last minute coup had frightened away all other previously pro-Western democratic officials. Thus having applied the last roll of wallpaper over a cracked and crumbling surface, Her Britannic Majesty's troops now began the final phase of this pull-out.

With all unnecessary non-fighting service personnel gone, the only British Forces left were those who if called upon, could shoot their way out. Over the preceding twenty-four hours, these armed soldiers had steadily been giving up their defended positions, funnelling through withdrawal points either to board ships in the harbour or aircraft at Khormaksar.

The RAF having been running a shuttle service up to Bahrain and back again for the last week, a round trip of two thousand miles. Now, on the 29th November, 1967, with only a handful of troops left at the airfield, 5 Para which was mainly 'D' Company, were to be the last out.

Urwin once again put the binoculars to his eyes, carrying out yet another visual sweep across the flat landscape to his front. With the sun almost directly overhead causing heat haze distortions which, aided by small whirling dust devils, also caused by the sun's blaze, there wasn't much to focus on.

Out of boredom Urwin swung his glasses towards the Arab township beyond the perimeter wire. During the four days the Company had been in their present position, very little shooting had been aimed their way. Throughout the day and night firing was heard almost constantly, but not intended for them. With the British evacuation only moments away from completion, the terrorist groups were once again squabbling. As for the troops waiting impatiently to

leave, this was of little consequence, they were only too glad to hear the savages shooting the hell out of each other. But for others aware of the seriousness of the situation, there was more to it than just leaving the locals to their own fate.

This withdrawal was proving to be yet another nail in the coffin of Western Democracy, and so it turned out. For before the coming spring, Russian war vessels were to be found regularly visiting and re-supplying themselves, from base ships stationed in the anchorage. While large Soviet transport planes made full use of one of the most modern military airbases the RAF had ever built, staging their journey's back and forth to pro-communist African Nations.

"Here Dave have a sup, last brew before Bahrain." Urwin lowered his binoes to find Mick Pridmore placing a mug of tea on the sandbag wall in front of him.

"Cheers," he acknowledged, releasing the cream-painted binoculars, allowing them to dangle on his chest, while cocking a wrist to check the time.

"How long we got?" asked Pridmore.

"Hour and ten minutes," replied the Corporal, putting the mug to his lips.

"Jesus!" he exclaimed having been caught out by the rim of the aluminium mug, which burned his lips.

"Here you drink it for a bit, it's hot enough, I'll have some when the fucking mug's cool," stated Urwin returning it to the wall.

He was right, being midday it was far too hot to be taking warm liquids, but with the Company's pull-out time nearing, his men were taking the opportunity of having a final meal in anticipation of the long journey up to Bahrain.

An hour later the men waited, Bergens on their backs, weapons to hand, ready for the word to go. Urwin with a radio stowed in his pack, had just given a check over the air, confirming he still had communications with his Company control HQ.

Now with the last Beverley aircraft having landed a few minutes earlier and poised with engines idling, he didn't intend any delay through bad radio-comms. Holding the handset to his ear so as not to miss any transmission meant for him, Urwin was made to wait three minutes past the agreed time, before his call came through.

"Hello four-eight this is four Bush Rabbit, over."

Squeezing the send button the Corporal acknowledged, "Four-eight,

Bush Rabbit roger, out." Then securing the handset to his webbing, picked up his rifle to begin directing the movement of his patrol towards the waiting aircraft.

"Right that's us, you first Mick, off you go."

Pridmore slung his gimpy over his shoulder to lead the way at a brisk walk. With a twenty-five metre interval, he set the second member of his patrol after the big gunner. Then allowing himself the same spacing, followed on, with Paddy Kieran bringing up the rear. A hundred metres from the aircraft, Captain Aldrich placed Urwin and Pridmore in a small sandbagged sangar, to cover the rest of the Company as its patrols fell back from the perimeter defences.

With the noise of the Beverley engines rhythmically ticking over in the back ground, the two men watched as these four man parties closed in across the sand, onto the concrete runway, from a dozen different positions around the airfield. With weapons held at the ready, shirts open, sweating heavily from the hot midday conditions, each hunched forward with the weight of their Bergens. Striding in with a set measured pace, an occasional bright silver flash reflecting from the badge on their berets, they were arrogantly informing those watching that they were pulling out, yes — being driven out — never!

As the end patrol, Jim Sinclair's passed, Aldrich waved Urwin and his gunner in, to climb through the aircraft's rear starboard door. The last man to leave the concrete runway was the Commanding Officer, sending his Signaller aboard.

Colonel Hanning paused for a moment taking one final farewell sweeping gaze of Britain's newest lost colony, then reaching through the door, pulled himself up into the Beverley's freight compartment. This to the relief of the RAF Air Quarter Master waiting on the sill, with headphones connected to a long lead cable, which gave him communications with the pilot.

As the Parachute Colonel steadied himself in the door, the Air Quarter Master informed his pilot he was now clear for take-off. Before Dave Urwin could sit in one of the nylon net-sided seats, the brakes were released, allowing the propellers to 'bite' great chunks of still air, beginning the Beverley's head long rush down the runway.

Clutching a piece of metal frame work to hold his balance, he found himself forced against a round side window, looking out as the plane lifted off crossing the causeway and the waters of Aden harbour beyond. On passing Steamer Point he caught sight of two Wessex helicopters, flying in to pick up the very last troops on Aden soil. These were a number of Marine Commando picket posts, stationed at

strategic points as the final cover for the withdrawal. They would shortly be joining their base aircraft carrier, cruising a few miles outside the harbour.

When approaching a jagged hilly peninsula that was the now abandoned military complex of Little Aden, Urwin paused for a moment in the window. This giving him an unexpected, but grateful, final farewell to Billy Kennedy who, alongside 'Tam' MacSweeny, rested in a grave in the large, well-cared for British Cemetary, at the foot of a sprawling volcanic hill.

With the plane settling into a gradual climb out over the Gulf, Dave threw himself down in a nearby seat. Around him the men of the Company began showing various degrees of happiness, all pleased to be out of it, and on their way back to Blighty.

Opposite him he caught and returned a wink from Jim Sinclair, who was in the act of unloading his rifle. For Dave that wink said it all, 'we made it, and now we're going home'.

Clearing the ammunition magazine from his own rifle, he could thank God for not knowing that the next time he would have to kill, with a similar rifle, would be less than a mile from his Belfast childhood front door.

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